



IN ANDAMANS  
THE INDIAN BASTILLE

*By*  
BEJOY KUMAR SINHA



TO  
MY SISTER  
SUSHILA GHOSH  
WHO ALWAYS STOOD BY OUR SIDE  
DURING STORM AND STRESS  
WHO THROUGH HER INTENSE PAINS AND AGONIES  
SYMBOLISED IN MY LIFE  
THE SILENTLY SUFFERING WOMANHOOD  
OF OUR VAST MOTHERLAND



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## PREFACE

Fifteen years ago I was a student in a Cawnpore College. Like the average middle-class youth of our country I too, was not born with a silver spoon in the mouth. Poverty and suffering I had known from my childhood. Besides, being born in Cawnpore—the premier industrial town of the province—and brought up in this very city, I had many opportunities of seeing the squalor and misery that dogs the life of our toiling millions. Huddled together, I found workers' families living in dirty and dark huts that were not fit even for animals. Those days of my boyhood left an indelible impression upon me.

It was no wonder, therefore, that when I grew up and reached the higher classes of my school, I was unlike the average schoolboy. I found it impossible to keep myself confined within the strict limits of my immediate surroundings. I felt suffocated, cramped. My thoughts wandered. The grinding poverty of our teeming millions, their dark and dismal lives, haunted me in the midst of my daily school hours. It was in these days that by my persistent efforts I came in contact with revolutionaries and was initiated into their circles.

We were only two brothers and I did not know that my elder brother Mr. Raj Kumar Sinha had likewise joined the ranks of revolutionaries. He was a student at the Hindu University and was actively working from Benares as I learnt later. I was therefore a little surprised when one day my brother was arrested at Cawnpore on the eve of the 1925 session of the

Indian National Congress, and along with many others was charged to stand trial in the Kakori Conspiracy Case. Almost all the front rank members of revolutionary organisation in U. P. were arrested in the Kakori Case and it now fell on my shoulders and of a few of my comrades in other provinces to resuscitate the entire Northern-India organisation excluding Bengal.

I was a college student when my brother was arrested. My old father shocked by the arrest of my brother fell ill and died within a month. My brother was convicted a year later and sentenced to ten years' imprisonment. The growing demands of the party work and the family distress now made it impossible for me to continue my studies. I bade good-bye to my university career and entered my new life. As a cover to my political line of work I took to journalism and for obvious reasons worked as the representative of *The Statesman*, *The Times of India*, *The Pioneer* and the Associated Press of India.

My old feelings had not left me. They had grown stronger. I felt that our whole country was a vast prison-house. But on what concrete lines to achieve liberation? That was the question uppermost in my mind these days, all the more because the new and tremendous organisational responsibility had been given to me. For some time I had been studying world history and politics. Books on different ideologies were my chief reading. I had started work in the local Congress and in the Mazdoor Sabha. From my studies and experience the conclusion emerged clearly that national emancipation could come only through a relentless life-and-death struggle. When I looked round, I found it absent. Our Indian National Congress was not then the dynamic revolutionary organisation that it is today. It had no deep

root in the masses, since it had no clear economic and political programme for their day-to-day partial struggles. A large section of our premier national organisation was caught in the net of barren constitutionalism. The fight carried from within the legislatures unlinked with extra-parliamentary struggles, had turned into tactics of sterile wordy warfare. Attempts were made to frame a national constitution. But the mass force essential to get any such constitution accepted, was not being mobilised. Gandhiji and his adherents had taken no programme of mass action. The Indian proletariat was coming into its own. It had not yet grown into an independent political force, such as could exert tangible influence on the forms and methods of the broad national struggle. Peasant movement there was none. After Chauri Chaura the leaderless peasantry had, in different parts of the country, clashed with the government and its allies. But it shared the same fate as the scattered peasant revolts of the world history. Ranvir Rebellion in Andhra, Eka movement in U. P., Babbar Akalis' terror of the Punjab, Moplah Revolt in Malabar, Burmese peasant rising under Pongpis—were all marked for the heroism and determination displayed, but they all failed. There could be no other result when the whole movement lacked leadership, cohesion and ideology. Consequently the peasants were lying low. An inevitable reaction had set in.

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lise radical youths for mass work on socialistic lines. The sequel was the birth of Naujawan Bharat Sabha which was to shoulder this task. Through our day-to-day work we were moving gropingly towards Socialism.

I was entrusted with the work of organising the *secret wing in different parts of the country and in this connection I moved from province to province.* Two years of intense activity of our members in different provinces landed some of us in the Lahore Prison to stand our trial in what was known as the Lahore Conspiracy Case of 1929, against Bhagat Singh and others. After the farce of a trial before three High Court Judges constituting a tribunal as per Lahore Conspiracy Case Ordinance, death sentences were pronounced on Bhagat Singh, Rajguru and Sukhdeo, seven of us were given life imprisonments and two were sentenced to shorter terms. We had not participated in the Tribunal proceedings. There was no defence witness or defence lawyer. We had successfully *on u* *sistin* *whole country and evoked nation-wide protest.* We however were not surprised, for we had seen enough of the methods of British Justice in similar trials in our country.

After my conviction I was moved from one jail to another in different provinces as a 'C' class prisoner. From Lahore to Multan, from Multan to Rajahmandry, and then to Andamans and back again to Punjab—I have been tossed from one prison to another all these years, till I have just been released from Lucknow District Jail, on medical grounds.

So after nine years of life of a prisoner, I am free once more, free to realize my dream of participating

had grown in me that it was not enough. A life-and-death struggle was needed, requisite forces were to be mobilised, preparations had to be made. But where to make the start? How to galvanise our countrymen? What should be our immediate method of struggle? How to infuse life in the hearts of our enslaved millions? How to acquire a broader mass basis for the extant revolutionary organisation? Such were some of the problems that confronted me. I was set thinking. My thoughts took more and more a practical turn. I set out planning for definite steps. But I knew I was not alone. There were hundreds of youngmen in the country who were thinking or moving on the same lines. It therefore did not take us long to meet on the platform of a common organisation—the Hindusthan Socialist Republican Association. We had been studying socialism and accepted socialistic ideas. Our movement however had not yet assumed a clear socialistic character. Grown from the exclusive ranks of the lower middle class and in the economic and political setting that I have described above, the ideas inspiring our movement were a curious admixture of different political ideologies. The virile and the idealistic nationalism of Mazzini with its emphasis on revolutionary youths, the insurrection of the Blanquist type, the 'going-to-the-people' movement coupled with terroristic actions of the Russian Social Revolutionary Party, the October Revolution and its guiding ideology—Bolshevism—the influence of all these movements could be definitely traced in our ideas. But the socialistic feature was most dominant and it was natural, for the logic of the country's maturing events was giving a definite turn in this direction. In addition to a secret wing of the movement, we realised the need of an open broad-based organisation to mobi-

lise radical youths for mass work on socialistic lines. The sequel was the birth of Naujawan Bharat Sabha which was to shoulder this task. Through our day-to-day work we were moving gropingly towards Socialism.

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After my conviction I was moved from one jail to another in different provinces as a 'C' class prisoner. From Lahore to Multan, from Multan to Rajahmandry, and then to Andamans and back again to Punjab—I have been tossed from one prison to another all these years, till I have just been released from Lucknow District Jail, on medical grounds.

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again in the national struggle that has travelled a long way during the last decade. But it is not a pleasant experience to be released even on medical grounds and get the privilege of starting work anew when the opportunity is denied to those whom I have left behind. In the midst of my work, the idea haunts me that I am free but my hundreds of comrades are yet in chains. I recall vividly how in the cold icy cells of Andamans, under the worst repression and suffering, we used to meet in groups and discuss our hopes of the future—our line of work in the new, changed conditions. For hours we talked and grew animated. We built plans. Our dreams had no end. I now visualise at times the glowing faces of my comrades of those hours peering at me from behind the prison bars, looking with a longing at my good luck—in my realising the dream that was our common inspiration, our common solace.

Since my release I have been flooded with endless and varied questions regarding my comrades—the Andaman Prisoners. Why did they go on mass hunger-strike? Were they despaired? What is the full significance of their historic declaration to Gandhiji? What were the factors that brought this profound change in their ideas? Did long years of prison rigour too contribute their share to the change? In the event of their wholesale release where would they stand tomorrow in the country's struggle? Was Andamans a prisoner's Heaven or a Hell? Are the prisoners very restive today in not being released? There has been a stream of such questions from different quarters, from different individuals. Several papers have asked me to write about these aspects in their columns. At these queries I never felt annoyed. I welcomed them on the contrary, for I knew that it only indicated the due recognition by the country-

men of their revolutionary youth. Our people want to understand, to know the flower of their youth who languish behind prison bars today. The nation has demanded their release and it shall not rest till they are all set free—to take up their positions in the vanguard of the national revolutionary movement. On the eve of their release the endeavours to know them, understand them fully is timely and essential. It will facilitate the prompt harnessing of their tremendous revolutionary force to the developing of the national struggle. Wrong notions and unjustified bias about them would prove harmful and delay the necessary adjustment in our anti-imperialist camp.

In the face of the persistent queries, the idea occurred to me that I could best write a book to answer the large number of questions and thus do my little bit to dispel some of the prevailing misunderstandings, and give some positive and valuable information that is not known to the public. I have lost no time in working out my idea and found great solace in doing it—thus forging a living link with my incarcerated friends.

Written with this object as the main in view, this book has not been like the usual prison memoirs. It is too one-sided, dealing mainly with broad political aspects of the prisoners' life. The treatment again is throughout general, hardly bringing in the doings of particular individuals or groups. There is a human side of our life however, where frustration and ruthless subjection by a soulless prison machine is a story that is moving and profoundly tragic. One can hardly complain if within the prison walls, there exist no opportunities conducive to the flowering of individuality, for it is denied to one even outside under the present social system. But that is not all. Inside the imperialist prisons, deliberate methods are

opted as part of the general penal system, that aim  
 at dehumanising the inmates, killing their very soul  
 by a slow but steady process. To signify this very  
 character of the prisons, Dostoevsky named his work  
 on Siberian prison recollections as 'Dead House',  
 where men like Victor Hugo's Jean Valgean enter as  
 live and virile personalities but come out later, after  
 long years as dead and gone—mere physical seconds of  
 their former selves. Books like 'White Cross to Red  
 Flag', 'De Profundis' bring out the sad tale of a prison  
 life in a striking manner. During my years of im-  
 prisonment, I have not infrequently observed this  
 particular aspect of prison life. During my confine-  
 ment in Indian Jails with ordinary prisoners in com-  
 mon yards, I have in two or three cases felt having  
 witnessed a cold-blooded slow murder of individuals.  
 Before my very eyes I had seen how fine specimens  
 of sturdy and noble individuals succumbed to the  
 pernicious prison system and transformed into unre-  
 cognisable brutal creatures. Tempted though I felt  
 to include such tragic episodes in this book, I had  
 ultimately to restrain myself and keep to the main  
 line without deviations from the general story.  
 Dostoevsky's loving dog in Siberian exile, Jawahar-  
 lalji's warm care for little animals in prison, are stories  
 rich in their human appeal and lessons, but such narra-  
 tives unfortunately cannot, I realised, be included in  
 the short compass and limited scope of this book.  
 Since we entered jails in 1929 and lost de-  
 Jotin Das in the historic Lahore Hunger Strik  
 the question of prison reforms has been before the  
 public. Our popular Congress ministries, from  
 day they held the reins of government started tack-  
 ling this question in right earnest. In the Soviet Un-  
 prisons have been completely overhauled. Prison-  
 are treated with the warmest sympathy and

Successful experiments have been made to turn them into useful citizens. In thousands they are participating in their national Five Year Plans. They feel, they have also their duty, their obligations to society. With a zeal, that it seems hard to believe, they too have in thousands thrown themselves into the task of Socialist upbuilding. Prisoners also have their Stakhnovites and they are proud of them. In other parts of the world it would be wrong to expect any such fundamental change, for the prison system is but an essential part of the huge machinery of exploitation and it can only be radically changed after a revolution in the social order. Yet here too, public opinion has grown of late. Not only a Howard Society, but the wide public takes interest in questions of penology. The governments are yielding to the popular pressure and introducing reforms in their prisons on modern lines. Of course, these are democratic governments. Fascist administrations are also moving but in other directions. They are beating all records of severity and repression. The news of the concentration camps is meticulously suppressed. Yet it leaks out and the world is informed of the horror and cruelty of the fascist prisons and camps. The death of Carl von Ossietzky, the valiant and consistent fighter for world peace is a recent proof of how the fascists are treating their opponents in jails—worse than the galley slaves. Our British Imperialist government is steadily moving towards Fascism and its signs we discern in our little world too—the Andamans. How? I shall try to narrate that in the following pages. But our Congress ministries backed by the organised might of the masses are resisting the bureaucracy and changing the deplorable conditions of jails. At such times, wide discussions regarding jail conditions, especially by those who have been for years

behind prison bars would be much helpful. It would assist the people's ministers in taking the right direction. The limitations have handicapped me in discussing in details this aspect of the prison question, but the very narrative will help the readers to some extent, I believe, in detecting the dark spots, and glaring defects. I must however say it frankly here that what our honourable ministers have achieved till now, falls far short of our reasonable expectations. What is needed is a new approach, a fundamentally radical outlook on the whole prison problem. Without it mere minor improvements here and there, would not have much meaning. It would be wandering in a maze of details without reaching the basic root, and reconstructing the foundations.

A greater portion of the book deals with the two Andaman hunger-strikes and I hope the readers would appreciate it. The last mass hunger-strike made the Andamans for a time a first class political issue. In the remotest villages of the country people became conscious that in the distant islands beyond the ocean, hundreds of their best youths were pining away, were being dragged inch by inch towards a slow but sure death. The whole Nation arose and in one thundering voice demanded their repatriation and release. The hunger-strike was a record unsurpassed in world history. In the first hunger-strike we lost three of our beloved comrades—Mahabir, Mohit and Mohan. Of this strike meagre news reached our anxious countrymen. After the deaths, the government in a short communique informed the public of their sudden end. That was all that the nation could learn of its three valiant fighters, of its martyrs. During the second hunger-strike too, all the attempts to inform the people of our resolve, of our objects, were bailed. We had addressed lengthy communications

to our Congress ministers. They were withheld by the fiat of the India Government. The new constitution had been inaugurated and our popular ministers had just taken office. That a communication to them from the prisoners of their province too, could be withheld, showed us glaringly how a trained bureaucracy was to thwart the measures of our ministers. Of the record of Andamans these two hunger-strikes are the best chapters—our unique achievement. It is why I have tried my best to provide a clear insight into them, by treating them in all their aspects. What inspired us to go on hunger-strike? What was the technique followed when we had started it? Why were there no deaths in the last strike? Why did we hold out for so long even in the face of repeated messages from the country urging suspension? How we discussed and reached its termination? All these questions I have tried to answer. I am sure, remove some of the doubts that I have found persisting.

I have called the Andamans the Indian Bastille. But all historical parallels have their limitations, their qualifications. The Bastille of France fell, before the mighty onslaught of the masses that shook the whole of Feudal Europe from one corner to the other. From that day onwards the fall of the Bastille was immortalised in the revolutionary history of the world. Four years back in 1934 when the two hundred families of France conspired against the whole nation and manœuvred to usher in a fascist regime, the millions of workers and peasants gathered again on the streets of Paris in a solid phalanx. It was the 14th of July. They celebrated the storming of the Bastille. The betrayers hurriedly cowered back and entered their dens. The masses had recognised their Louis of the twentieth century. They forged the powerful

Popular Front to defeat their enemies and take up tasks yet unfulfilled. Masses recalled that the Bastille fell under the resounding revolutionary cries of Equality, Liberty and Fraternity, but these had yet to be achieved in a 'Free, Happy and Strong France'. Another struggle they have to wage, and they have their revolutionary tradition.

Such history has not been made in our country yet. Our Andamans is the Bastille of the pre-revolutionary era. Fighting against Feudal Imperialist structure the boldest of the country's sons have been for the past two decades thrown into dungeons in that distant island. These soldiers of the National Revolution had seen the feudal regime tottering. They had witnessed in Delhi the cruel magnificence of the court of a modern Louis. The Viceregal Palace towered high amidst the surrounding huts of a famished and dying people. Salaried high officials held enormous wealth while the peasants were breaking down under burdens of taxes and debts. Was not history repeating itself? Were not elements of decaying feudal France resurrected on Indian soil? So they questioned. Sitting on the floor of dark prison cells they recalled history. They remembered that Bastille had a past that had paved way for a glorious future.

That Andamans was our Bastille was not forgotten by our Jacobins of 1914-18. When the Berlin Committee of Indian Revolutionaries headed by Lala Hardayal, Raja Mahendra Pratap, Dr. Bhupendra Dutt and others negotiated with the Kaiser and planned a national insurrection in India with German assistance, the Andamans was assigned a definite place in the scheme of action. It was decided to take ships from the Far East to storm the island and set all prisoners free. As is well known, the whole plan of this Blanquist insurrection failed—as had been the

fate of the simultaneous Sinnfein attempts in Ireland. The government got scent of the proposed raid on Andamans and hurriedly made necessary arrangements for the island's defence. A number of British boats patrolled the adjacent sea day and night.

The fortress of Peter and Paul in Czarist Russia confined within its walls hundreds of Russian revolutionaries—the front rank fighters. It stood as a grim symbol of the bulwark of European reaction. It is known that prisoners who once entered the fortress walls, seldom came out alive. They slowly sunk in their prison graves. It is a wonder that from Andamans the nation has been fortunate to get back so many of its valiant sons alive. The degree of Andamans repression in the Great War days was in no way less than what we read of the Russian fortress. Extreme courage and fortitude were needed to resist the authorities all through the years and yet keep alive. Not a few were lost in this heroic struggle. Several comrades died and there were others who lost their control on nerves and turned insane. We have no book amongst us like 'Sixteen years in Siberia' by Leo Deutsch graphically describing the horrors of prison life and the unflinching struggle of the political prisoners. I know the present book cannot go far in this direction except indicating the necessity of such a volume. I would therefore be so glad if any one of our old guards takes up this task and preserves for the nation a chapter that forms the proud and heroic tale of our early fighters.

Prisons have been aptly called the university for the politicals. Forcibly detached from the zone of active struggle, in studies alone a prisoner finds the greatest comfort and utility of his daily jail life. He reads to know, to understand, to equip himself better for the future work. His daily studies give a meaning



to his jail life, a steady purpose. He feels that all links are not snapped. Diving in his books on world history, economics, philosophy, his country's past and the present, he forges a live contact with his outside world of struggle. He warms up, almost forgets his prison surroundings and their limitations. If the prisoners are fortunately concentrated in one jail, their studies, provided they get the necessary facilities, widen in scope with mutual assistance and cooperation. A university atmosphere is created. But what is more important in concentration camps is the tremendous lot of thinking and discussion that ensues amongst the prisoners. Away from the heat of the struggle, from the day-to-day rough-and-tumble of political life, the prisoners grow philosophic. They develop a critical attitude. The past is surveyed in all its aspects. The forms of struggle, the tactics adopted, the organisational structure—all get due attention. For days and months these are discussed and out of this wholesome activity of general stock-taking crystallise some definite conclusions as guides for future action and for future struggle. There is another bright feature of concentration jails. They serve as a training camp. The less advanced and the amateur revolutionaries are steeled in contact with tried and experienced workers. Theoretical training they receive in abundance and at times, it becomes possible even to have some lessons in the art of practical work, in case the concentration is of hundreds of prisoners in the same jail with free access to each other. In writing of all these possibilities of jail life, I have in my mind, of course, not the fascist prisons but the jails of such countries where a show of democracy is still being preserved.

Interesting are some details of such activities that we learn of Russian and Spanish prisons. At the

close of the last Nineties Lenin had been sent to Siberian exile. It was the formative period of the Russian Social Democratic movement. Conflicting and harmful trends were creeping in. These were being openly preached to gain converts. One such theory that was advanced later became known as 'Credo'. This theory reached Lenin in exile. He at once jumped up and assembling his fellow exiles numbering over a score, discussed it and drafted a crushing joint reply refuting the pernicious doctrine. He condemned it as a theory of Economism—an attempt to keep the labour movement confined within economic limits, with political leadership of the liberal bourgeoisie secure over it. In Siberian exile, class and group discussions were held wherever the revolutionaries got opportunities. Several books too were written throwing light on the problems facing the immediate struggle. To refute the social Revolutionary Party's contention that Russian conditions were unique and that capitalism was not growing and could be skipped, Lenin wrote the famous book 'Development of Capitalism in Russia.' The pages of the volume gave crushing replies to petty bourgeois subjective theorists. From Stalin's biography again we learn that he was a keen debator in jail and his participation in discussions and studies always made them lively and helpful. He was a voracious reader and was ever ready to assist his comrades in chalking out their line of studies and giving them the necessary guidance.

In recent Spanish history when the Asturias rising of 1934, despite the heroic struggle of miners, was suppressed by the reactionary forces, thousands of revolutionary soldiers were thrown into prisons. Most of them were rank-and-file workers. They had an iron will and unflinching determination to resume the struggle. They set themselves to prepare for the

future. With the assistance of advanced comrades, they started a vigorous and systematic study of national problems. Lectures were organised on the strategy and tactics of their struggle. Spanish and World history were critically surveyed. Day after day the workers' vision widened. From raw workers they were getting transformed into sound political leaders of the future battle. When with the victory of the Popular Front, these thousands of steeled soldiers were liberated, they immediately rushed to the vanguard of the struggle; and when Franco rebelled, they were found taking a lead in the front-line trenches and also in the rear in the national mobilisation. To resist the rebels the whole Spanish people rose and in this gigantic task, the liberated prisoners successfully applied their acquired knowledge and set the masses in motion. Due to the special aptitude and training that they had received, they were spread all over the country. They supplied a leadership that the enthusiastic but untrained masses mostly needed in their new revolutionary tasks. Spanish history has been noted for repeated and determined revolts of the starving peasantry, but equally as well for the repeated failures, due to the lack of coordination and inefficient leadership. Anarchism had been powerful in this land of small-scale production and it had been a great factor in jeopardising the movement's success. With this background, the swelling of the ranks of the leadership by freed prisoners can be appraised at its real value.

In our country, we know the imprisonment of 1930-34 years proved a blessing in disguise for our national movement. The origin of the Congress Socialist Party has to be traced to some of our active and able comrades who were imprisoned during this period. They were leading workers in Congress

ranks for years. In the very early days of the movement they were removed to prison. Before their very eyes masses had wonderfully responded to the Congress call. But as the days advanced mass enthusiasm waned. Gandhiji dramatically introduced Harijan uplift—a purely social reform programme as a major activity for Congressmen. An attitude of compromise was manifest. The movement had objectively failed in spite of its glorious beginnings. A section of the Congress sought relief in a drift towards constitutionalism. The average rank-and-file Congressman who had fought so valiantly stood perplexed. He sensed the need of a bold revolutionary leadership, and a new technique of struggle. But these were not forthcoming. There was another section of Congressmen—front-line workers, who were in jails; they were our future socialists. They saw the defeat and began critically thinking over it. Discussions were started, and views were exchanged. The past was surveyed especially since the 1921 campaign. As a result certain definite views crystallised. In the process of sincere self-criticism some truths were discovered. It was found that the Congress had failed to mobilise the masses as a disciplined and organised force, as its method of struggle and objective were not clear. No economic and political programme had been formulated in order to voice the immediate demands of the exploited masses. Day-to-day partial mass struggles had not been organised, as the only effective method of consistently drawing in the masses in the broader anti-imperialist political struggle. From such realisations of our comrades precipitated the idea of forming the Congress Socialist Party.

The Andamans was no exception. Its history records the same tale. From the year 1933 the government concentrated in the cellular jail, Port Blair,

picked youths from all over the country, who had all participated in the nation's struggle against British Imperialism. Youngmen were transferred from jails of many provinces—Assam, Punjab, U. P., Bengal, Madras and Bihar. As was natural the Bengal contingent was the biggest, forming the overwhelming majority, for it was only there that the revolutionary youth movement had reached the proportions of the Irish Sinnfein Struggle.

The Dublin rising had its second in the Chittagong Armoury Raid. It was a remarkable coincidence that Sir John Anderson, the organiser of the Black and Tan regime, was at the head of the Bengal Administration during these years of tumult.

The youths who were assembled had come from different parts of the country. Their level of political knowledge, their traditions, forms of struggle, and ideas were not all similar. As has been mentioned the movements in the Punjab and some allied Northern India provinces were gropingly moving towards socialism while on the other hand Bengal activities were of an intense character paralleled somewhat by the phase of Russian Social Revolutionary Movement of the closing of the last century. An organic contact between these youth movements at different stages could not be effected outside. Its most active members who survived, however, happened to meet inside. Their confinement in the islands during the years 1933 to 1937 was a period in our country's history that recorded gigantic revolutionary changes. A definite orientation had come in our premier national organisation—the Indian National Congress. The Congress was reaching the masses, was fast growing into the Anti-Imperialist Front of all the revolutionary forces. An All-India Peasants organisation had come into being. The breach in the working class

forces was being healed. Indian struggle was moving forward as part of a world revolutionary struggle against Fascism, against Imperialism. The news of these important events had been carried over the ocean and delivered to us within our high prison walls. It reached us at a time when we had already started discussing amongst ourselves the past of our movement. We were realising that our methods had to be changed, that we had to wage our struggle with Imperialism with new weapons and a new technique. We felt that the sacrifices of the revolutionaries during the last three decades had undoubtedly infused life into the hearts of our countrymen but the price paid was too dear and often energies were frittered away that could be harnessed far better in other effective ways of struggle. In this sincere and searching analysis of our own movement, while we were reaching remarkably clear conclusions regarding the negative aspects, we found it a difficult task to obtain the same clarity on a positive plane, on the question of what to do next and how? It was therefore of great help to us, to learn of the country's developments and appraise their significance. We had started systematic studies of world history, politics, economics, and in the light of knowledge gained, we attempted to interpret the march of our national events. So frequently we missed the mark. Gross under-estimations or again wide over-estimations were not rare. It had to be, for we were away from the battle-front, hundreds of miles away, only with little bits of news reaching us from time to time. Through all this process of reading and thinking we were arriving at definite views about the future line of our work. Without this preliminary and radical change, it would not have been possible for us to promptly send to Gandhiji and through him to the nation, our declaration with

picked youths from all over the country, who had all participated in the nation's struggle against British Imperialism. Youngmen were transferred from jails of many provinces—Assam, Punjab, U. P., Bengal, Madras and Bihar. As was natural the Bengal contingent was the biggest, forming the overwhelming majority, for it was only there that the revolutionary youth movement had reached the proportions of the Irish Sinnfein Struggle.

The Dublin rising had its second in the Chittagong Armoury Raid. It was a remarkable coincidence that Sir John Anderson, the organiser of the Black and Tan regime, was at the head of the Bengal Administration during these years of tumult.

The youths who were assembled had come from different parts of the country. Their level of political knowledge, their traditions, forms of struggle, and ideas were not all similar. As has been mentioned the movements in the Punjab and some allied Northern India provinces were gropingly moving towards socialism while on the other hand Bengal activities were of an intense character paralleled somewhat by the phase of Russian Social Revolutionary Movement of the eighties of the last century. An organic contact between these youth movements at different stages could not be effected outside. Its most active members who survived, however, happened to meet inside. Their confinement in the islands during the years 1933 to 1937 was a period in our country's history that recorded gigantic revolutionary changes. A definite orientation had come in our premier national organisation—the Indian National Congress. The Congress was reaching the masses, was fast growing into the Anti-Imperialist Front of all the revolutionary forces. An All-India Peasants organisation had come into being. The breach in the working class

forces was being healed. Indian struggle was moving forward as part of a world revolutionary struggle against Fascism, against Imperialism. The news of these important events had been carried over the ocean and delivered to us within our high prison walls. It reached us at a time when we had already started discussing amongst ourselves the past of our movement. We were realising that our methods had to be changed, that we had to wage our struggle with Imperialism with new weapons and a new technique. We felt that the sacrifices of the revolutionaries during the last three decades had undoubtedly infused life into the hearts of our countrymen but the price paid was too dear and often energies were frittered away that could be harnessed far better in other effective ways of struggle. In this sincere and searching analysis of our own movement, while we were reaching remarkably clear conclusions regarding the negative aspects, we found it a difficult task to obtain the same clarity on a positive plane, on the question of what to do next and how? It was therefore of great help to us, to learn of the country's developments and appraise their significance. We had started systematic studies of world history, politics, economics, and in the light of knowledge gained, we attempted to interpret the march of our national events. So frequently we missed the mark. Gross under-estimations or again wide over-estimations were not rare. It had to be, for we were away from the battle-front, hundreds of miles away, only with little bits of news reaching us from time to time. Through all this process of reading and thinking we were arriving at definite views about the future line of our work. Without this preliminary and radical change, it would not have been possible for us to promptly send to Gandhiji and through him to the nation, our declaration with



such signal unanimity.

But it would be wrong to imagine that this change was wrought smoothly in a straight line. The dissolution of old ties and allegiances, the snapping of links born in years of life-and-death struggle—this process in the lives of hundreds of youngmen, could not be but a disturbing and at times a painful story. Such is always the history of the birth of the new from the womb of the old. The inevitable birth pangs are always there to be recognised by interested observers. In our larger sphere of world society, we are witnessing to-day this same painful process—the emergence of a socialist society from the decaying world capitalism.

The story of this transition in our Andaman life is only next in importance to the hunger-strike struggles, and perhaps in one respect of greater significance than these strikes too, if we take in view the future role of middle class youth in the country's anti-imperialist struggle. Day-to-day this transition was moulded and shaped mostly by our studies. I have therefore endeavoured to describe in this narrative details of our intellectual activities—studies, discussions etc., tracing them through all their varied stages. It will, I am sure, give an interesting insight into the working of our mind and indicate to the reader the future line of work of most of my comrades who are behind bars to-day but are sure to be free to-morrow. It will be seen that the march of events in the country had its clear imprint on our lives in the distant prisons.

The reader may enquire as to why the government concentrated us all in one prison? Was it not conscious of the risks that it faced? We ourselves had sometimes thought over the matter but the reason was not far to seek. The government was faced with a dilemma. It had to make its choice between the

devil and the deep sea. While we were in the country scattered in a large number of jails, the government discovered that the nation did not forget its youths languishing behind the bars. Warm and active contacts were always made between us and our countrymen outside, even in the jails of remotest places. This was an eyesore to the government. It could not tolerate the expression of the least sympathy and warmth for us. The government wanted us to be isolated completely from our people and thought it would achieve its object by deporting us to the distant islands, far, far away from the sight of our countrymen. It knew that there were dangers in concentration too, but it considered them a lesser evil. That the government was conscious of the possibilities of a concentration jail is amply proved from the method that it had pursued in dividing the detainees in different camp jails. Comrades whom it considered incorrigible old guards, were carefully selected and all sent to the remote Deoli Camp in Ajmer. The rest who were held to be comparatively young in age and experience were distributed in the two camp jails of Hijli and Berhampur. That a government faces such uncomfortable situations is no rare phenomenon today. In the wider domain of world politics the threatened Imperialist and Fascist governments have daily to steer their course through a series of dangers. History is against them but they will not go down without a last desperate effort. The prospect of futility does not deter them but only makes them panicky and wild, in an endeavour to gain the last lease for their lives.

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prison in Andhra, I was placed in the midst of hundreds of my comrades of the Civil Disobedience Campaign. To meet me the first day, there was a regular stampede but many of those who met me were visibly disappointed. The reason I was told when I grew familiar with them. I was informed that their expectations were not fulfilled. They had thought that as a northern India revolutionary, a colleague of Bhagat Singh and Azad, I would be a flaming youth of an austere face with red hot eyes; that I would be sullen and silent, would fly at a tangent at the least provocation from the authorities. In short they expected a revolutionary to be an uncommon creature—an object of adoration and respect but inspiring positive fear and awe. I know such ideas are fast being removed when many of the prisoners who have been released have already become well-known workers in the open field of our struggle. Yet there are misunderstandings, wrong estimations and impressions. Revolutionaries do not want to be awe-inspiring figures. They wish to be recognised as common soldiers in our common struggle for social and political emancipation. It becomes all the more imperative when the released prisoners have in their hundreds to take their stand shoulder to shoulder with their struggling people. I would feel satisfied if this book goes even a little way forward to facilitate this task. In all these pages my main object has been to bring my imprisoned comrades nearer to their fighting countrymen. Jawaharlalji in his autobiography mentions an incident of two young boys who met him on the eve of his departure from Calcutta and states how sorry he felt that such fine and precious material was not unoften lost to the nation. The ardour, devotion and will for the country's cause that the two youths displayed were not an isolated feature. It was sympto-

matic of the thousands of revolutionary middle class youths. Let us not sigh again that the country failed to realise their tremendous potentialities. It is high time for the nation to recognise in its youth the pioneer and a section of the vanguard of the national revolution. It becomes further incumbent on it to know it fully and reach it with a correct approach. Thus only can be made easy and possible the play of revolutionary youths' historical role in the anti-imperialist movement with least unnecessary friction and delay.

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through the book. I however felt that delay would take away much of the value and object of the book. I therefore crave the pardon of the reader and hope he will overlook the defects, which are only too glaring.

BEJOY KUMAR SINHA

SINHA BHAWAN, CAWNPORE

*January 31, 1939*



## CHAPTER I

### EXILE

It was winter 1932 in the Rajahmandri Central Jail of the Madras province. I had just finished my usual walk one cold October morning, when the daily 'Hindu' copy came; and scanning its columns I found, prominently featured on the main sheet, the news that the Secretary of State had sanctioned the *deportation of one hundred 'terrorist' prisoners to Andamans*. The news did not surprise me for I was expecting the Government to take some such decision. It had been appearing in the press for some time past that the government was contemplating the concentration of all 'terrorist' prisoners in some remote place beyond India, with the obvious object of depriving them of their countrymen's sympathy and contact. Some old military barracks in Aden were mentioned in this connection. In my imagination I had been picturing the life that awaited the prisoners. Would not the large number of Indian settlers in Aden baffle the Government's move? But all my speculations were set at rest. Andamans had now been selected. I had, however, never thought of it, for the Government of India had, following the Cardew Committee's recommendations a decade ago, definitely decided the closure of Andamans for political prisoners.

But I was wrong for I should not have forgotten that these were days when the entire nation was fighting British Imperialism, and in desperation the govern-



ment had resorted to methods of naked force and repression. The whole country was being ruled by the fiat of H. E. The Viceroy. It was a regime of ordinances and there was no room, nor time for the government to show the least regard for public opinion.

The reaction that the Andaman news had on me was exhilarating. It seemed, however, so strange to my prison friends. They were many, Rajahmandri being a concentration jail for all classes of C. D. prisoners. They came running to me, offering their warm sympathies. They were so sad and depressed. One of the Andhra comrades who had grown very intimate with me broke down in a flood of tears. With many of them a deep affection had grown during all those prison days. That we had been workers of two different spheres and methods, had not stood in the way. We had felt the tie that bound us all in the face of the common foe.

My friends were puzzled at my joy which I could hardly repress. It could not be otherwise for I had no chance to tell them how I longed for the association of my intimate comrades, all through the days that I had been separated from them and moved from prison to prison. In the life of a revolutionary almost all relations of what we usually call personal life are broken by the very nature and demands of work. But in the place of normal personal ties, another grows up—the bond of comradeship between colleagues who work for years together, sharing the same hopes and aspirations, marching through common suffering and privations. The pleasure of fighting for a cause is immense in the life of a revolutionary, but it is transformed into supreme bliss when this privilege is afforded to him in intimate companionship with his comrades-in-arms. He alone knows what rare joy is achieved in facing death together with trusting and

brave friends. In such a life many fall fighting but their memory remains ever green to inspire their surviving comrades to march ahead.

I had been convicted towards the close of 1930. During the undertrial period and just after, I had lost several of my esteemed comrades. Sirdar, Rajaguru, Azad, Jotin, Bhagwati Charan, were all gone. The few of us who remained behind drew close and sought solace in our strengthened bonds, in our dwindled numbers. How we craved that after our conviction the government might impose all hardships on us, but grant us the one privilege of remaining together in jail. But such were not the intentions of the authorities. Their attitude was amply clear from the beginning, by their putting us in 'C' class and rushing through the executions. The Punjab Government for about a month kept us confined in one common cellular block of the Lahore Central Jail. But we were not together. In our cells we were locked up day and night for no other offence but being declared by the government as 'Dangerous Prisoners'. We remained silent for some time and later protested by a hunger-strike. Sirdar, Sukhdeo and Raj Guru were also in the same jail in the condemned prisoners' ward. The news of our strike reached them. Immediately they joined us. The Government was perturbed at the latest development. Within a few days it climbed down and assured us of a settlement. The strike was terminated. Only a few days after, we were suddenly, one night, transferred to Multan Central Jail. The government, however, did not like to keep us in the Punjab, or in any other Northern India province. It, therefore, transferred seven of us to Madras Presidency Jails. The I. G. of Prisons, of the Punjab, Col. Barker had come in close contact with us during the undertrial period and had always

been taking a keen personal interest in us. We were, therefore, sent to the new province with definite instructions that we should be segregated and kept in different jails. As a consequence, I was taken to Rajahmundry Central Jail in Andhra, along with my case-mate Sheo Verma. My other comrades were divided in batches of two and sent to other central jails excepting Kamal Nath Tiwari who was kept all alone in Cannanore Central Jail on the Malabar Coast. For several months we were the only two political prisoners in our jail and had to fight several times against deliberate provocations from the authorities. On the one hand the jail officials were adamant, and we too, on the other hand, were determined to get the privileges of a political prisoner. The trial had to take the usual form of a hunger-strike for a protracted period. In the end, the authorities yielded. We were allowed the daily 'Hindu' and other cultural facilities. Our diet was improved upon and some other physical amenities were granted. Then came 1932—the resumption of the Civil Disobedience Campaign. Hundreds of Congress workers of Andhra became our associates. I was happy, daily forming new acquaintances, overwhelmed by the warmth and cordiality of my new companions.

But in the midst of the cheerful company I was ever feeling that this valued association would last only for a short duration. My new friends were all short-term prisoners and would part in the near future. I was, therefore, hoping against hope to get a chance of meeting my case-mates with whom I had parted company in the Punjab. So when the news about Andamans appeared in the press, I grew jubilant and realised that I would now get this opportunity. I was besides myself with joy, for not only was I going to pass my future days in company with my

colleagues of the past but also amidst the unique association of hundreds of revolutionary youths assembled from all parts of the country.

That we as Lahore Conspiracy Case Prisoners would be selected for the list of one hundred prisoners to be sent to Andamans, I had not the least doubt. The Madras Government had grown literally tired of us. With us there had been constant trouble in jails all over the presidency. Hunger-strikes there had been a number of times; some of us had been flogged by orders of the local government, others were exempted on medical grounds. All this stirred the public opinion of the presidency and evoked wide sympathy. The government, watching this development, felt uneasy and the more so as it felt that it had invited unnecessary trouble on its own head by agreeing to keep us in its prisons. On the floor of the Madras Council the Law Member declared that in future they were not going to accept any more Northern India prisoners who invariably proved so troublesome and 'undermined the discipline' of the whole jail. In view of these facts our getting the chance of deportation was a certainty.

An unforeseen event occurred now, that delayed our deportation and to this day it is difficult for me to say whether it was not a blessing in disguise. For it brought me and my friends in live contact through struggle, with Andhra youth and the wider Andhra public. I treasure the memory of those days and find that it is equally fresh in the minds of the large number of Andhra friends who are active today in the thick of their mass movement.

We had been joined recently by one comrade Jaideo Kapoor who had been transferred from Bellvillere Central Jail. It so happened one day that when we were going on our usual rounds in the jail

barracks, a new member of the prison staff not recognising us behaved most rudely and, on our protesting, endeavoured to retaliate by man-handling us. We were never prepared in jail life to tolerate such liberties of the jail officers. As the best course, we resisted and severely assaulted the officer. On a report made to the local government the Governor-in-Council ordered us to be flogged and be further punished by the deprivation of all privileges. Kapoor was actually flogged and Varma and myself, found too weak to stand the stripes, were exempted on medical grounds. Besides, we were informed by our jail superintendent that he would have to deny us henceforth the rights and facilities that we had so far enjoyed.

It now became a question of prestige for us to re-establish our rights as political prisoners. We accordingly claimed it in course of a representation to the government and failing to obtain any reply declared a hunger-strike. Within a month of the strike our condition became serious and simultaneously the public opinion outside grew organised and insistent in our favour. The Madras government was in a mood to yield but failing to persuade the Punjab government to come down, it intimated us telegraphically that privileges could be given to us only on medical grounds. We refused to accept the offer and thereupon the local government first endeavoured to send us back to our Punjab jails. As physically we were too weak to bear the strain of this long journey, their efforts failed. The increasing volume of sympathy of the Andhra public was engaging the serious attention of the government. To lessen it the authorities regarded it as essential to check the leaking of news about our physical condition, and with this end in view we were separated and con-

fined in three different jails.

I was brought to Vizagapatam Central Prison as the only casual prisoner in a jail of 'habituals'. It did in fact entail complete segregation in my case. But the strike continued. It was after two months of the strike that in January 1933 I was entrained one day under supervision of an expert doctor and learnt that we were all on our way to the Andamans. From Berhampore Varma also was being transferred by the same train. Our mail train had reached half-way towards Madras, when to our utter dismay, we were withheld and sent back to our respective jails, apparently under cabled instructions from the Chief Commissioner of the Andamans. The Port Blair authorities, we learnt later, feared that our reaching Andamans while on hunger-strike would only hasten the strike there that was already being discussed and planned.

I was much disappointed by this turn of events. For I came to know that by the boat that was to carry us, all my case-mates, excepting we three, were deported. I was so near to meeting them after a long period, and now? They had gone so far away. The strike continued. It had virtually become a trial of strength and endurance. There was now no more any material prospect in view, for it was clear that we would follow our comrades to the Andamans as soon as our struggle terminated and we became physically fit for the voyage. In response to the repeated appeals of the Congress leaders and our other friends we finally called off the strike. It had continued for full five months and ten days, and to get rid of us as early as possible, the authorities now gave us daily very rich and nutritious diet, as also stimulating medicines. Within two months we were somehow declared fit and in June 1933, I was one day carried in ambulance to

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the Railway station and put in the mail train for Madras. In the same train my other comrades Kapoor and Varma joined me from their respective places.

Just a few days before our departure we had learnt of Mahabir's death in Andamans. Our source of information was the same as of the general public in the country—the few lines of a communique issued from Delhi. A day or two before we started, there was again another communique. This time it conveyed the news of the martyrdom of Mohit and Mohan—two other hunger-strikers. So the strike had been launched in Devil's Island and sooner than expected.

The government was sending us to exile but we felt as if we were starting on pilgrimage to a field of battle. We had discussed and decided that as soon as we reached the Port Blair Jail we would be by the side of our fighting comrades. It would be an unique privilege to begin our new chapter of Andaman life with this grim struggle.

Our transfer news had leaked somehow and an enterprising Andhra comrade outside, managed to communicate it telegraphically to all important way-side stations. As a consequence there were such touching scenes that I have not forgotten even to this day. Our mail train was running in night hours. It was raining heavily. Yet on all important railway stations came scores of Andhra friends—both known and unknown, to give us a farewell. It was an unique send-off. We were escorted by armed guards who had orders not to allow anybody to approach our compartment even. Our friends heavily drenched in rains stood on the platforms, looking towards us and bidding us adieu. We were in a very weak state of health and they knew that as a matter of course we would be joining the Andaman strike as soon as we reached the islands. This made their hearts

heavy, for most of them felt certain that we would perish in the strike like other three comrades. On the platforms several of them stood silent, moved, with tears rolling down their faces. Three of my intimate friends who had been recently released from our jail as civil disobedience prisoners, boarded the train, and were going a C. I. D. They had to take the risk of jumping from the running train and make good their escape.

Our train reached Madras a day before the ship was due to leave. We were consequently taken to the Madras Penitentiary and detained there. The next day we started for the jetty.

Elaborate police arrangements had been made when we were taken to the port. A huge black giant awaited us—the *Maharajah*, the government-chartered boat that was to carry us to our destination. Before we boarded it we raised our usual slogans, 'Long Live Revolution,' 'Victory to Workers', 'Down, Down with Imperialism'. Our voices rang out and floated in the air till we were marched to the dark cellars at the bottom of the ship and were locked up. There was also a large number of ordinary prisoners who were going to the islands but they were kept separated from us in different blocks—all huddled together like so many cattle. They were noisy, busy in trying to make a little room for their mattress, blanket, and the iron plates. In contrast, in our own block we were completely silent. Nobody was in a mood to talk. There was a rush of thoughts dominated by the ideas of the Andaman hunger-strike that was continuing as a determined struggle. We remembered Mahabir, Mohan and Mohit—the three departed comrades. We thought of how we would reach the

remote islands and be privileged to join our fighting comrades. How would our friends greet us? By the time our boat takes us to the destination will some more strikers fall in the battle? A chain of such ideas filled our minds. We were engrossed in our thinking when the engines roared and the ship sailed on its voyage. There was a big hole-like opening for ventilation in our block. We all gathered near it and looked out. We were still inside the port—the ship was moving slowly headed by pilots. For the first time all our thoughts vanished and we were in the grip of one single dominating idea—that we were in exile, that we were bidding adieu to our dear Motherland. Longingly we looked towards the shores that were fast growing dim. The ship by this time had reached outside the Port and entered the open sea. We still were looking behind. In the distance were the high clock-tower and some other huge buildings. We fixed our gaze at them till they faded away from our sight. Nothing was visible now excepting a little boat with a solitary fisherman's figure sitting on it, being tossed about on the waves. For us he symbolised at the moment our struggling toiling countrymen. Would we ever be back again to be in their midst? We did not know.

This departure from our land was very painful, and later it seemed somewhat curious to us, for we had thought that sentiments of pure nationalism had no hold on us. On enquiry from my other comrades at Andamans I learnt that their parting too was no less painful. With glistening tears many of them had taken their last view of the Indian shores. One of the prisoners had solemnly picked up a little dust from the port-grounds and treasured it in a phial for months afterwards in the jail. It was the dust of his dear Motherland, so he had felt, which it would

not be his privilege to kiss for years ahead. Another batch from Bengal while being deported cried out spontaneously in deep sad voice "Mall Viday" (Mother, Adieu). Hardly had the waves carried the parting message of the exiled sons when once more they cried out—this time in a more resonant voice—"Bande Mataram." They remembered it was the same cry with which the nation had struggled for the last three decades, with which so many revolutionaries in the prime of their lives had given their last salutations to their countrymen and kissed the gallows.

I have mentioned these emotional reactions to show that in spite of our beginning to see through the complex issues of the national struggle—the division of our countrymen into two antagonistic camps of the minority of vested interests and the majority of the oppressed people—we were still moved so deeply by feelings of pure nationalism—the thought that our mother was chained by alien rulers and that she called out for help and resistance.

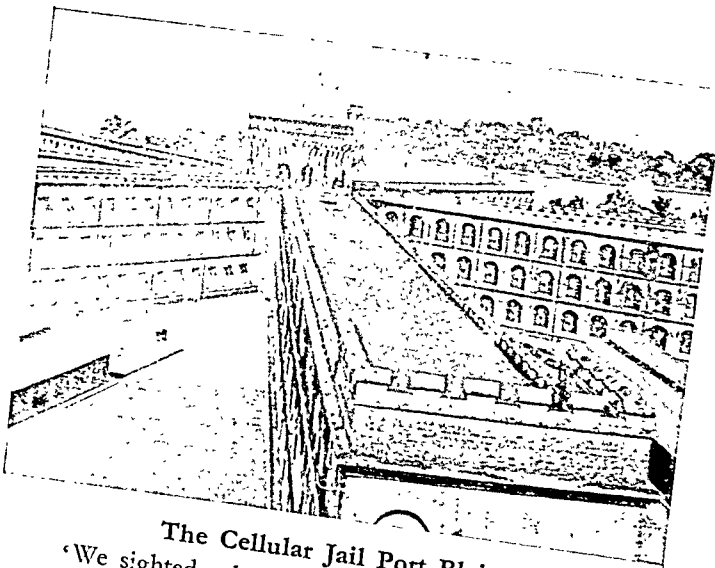
It took three and a half days for the ship to reach Andamans. There were no events or incidents for us. We were lying in our block—everyone of us suffering from sea-sickness. It was our first sea-voyage. The Police that escorted us were mostly people of the Punjab. Some of them stood guard over us day and night. When they learnt that we were political prisoners and further that we were colleagues of late Sirdar Bhagat Singh they overwhelmed us with the warmth of their good wishes and care. They did not know—poor ordinary constables—how to express their deep sympathy. One of them, an old bearded fellow would come and say, "Don't be disturbed, Allah will soon get you liberated." Another would come and smuggle in

some part of his ship rations—a little sugar and tea. A third on duty would take someone of us out, and on the plea of bathing would allow us to move about for some time in the fresh air outside our dark dungeons. All these little comforts and cares lavished on us by our people, we so gratefully acknowledged in our hearts. We were imagining the historic revolts on ships, our brave Garhwalis of Peshawar, National Militia—all jumbled up in a picture of recollections of the past linked up with the visions of the future.

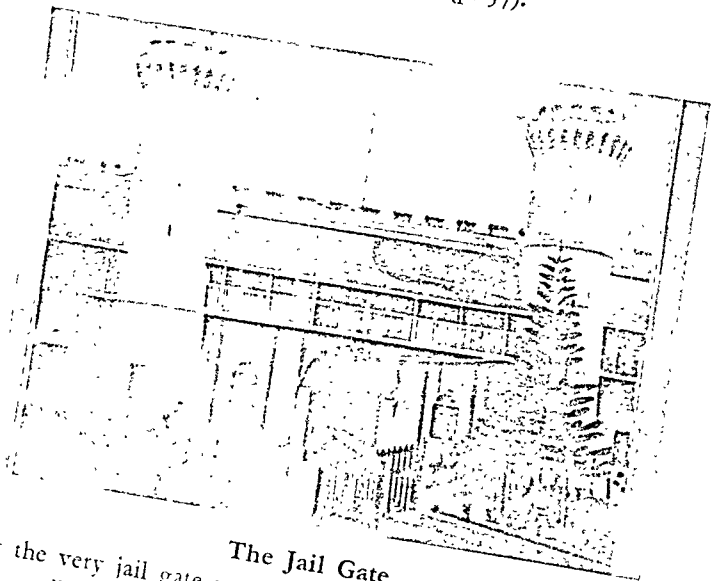
At night sleep was not possible. The prisoners blocks were big iron cages just of the type in which at times animals are carried on railway wagons. These were round the boilers of the ship—quite dark even during the day time. Dim lights were burning there the whole time. The atmosphere was suffocating. It was a real blessing for us to stand turn by turn during night hours at the ventilation hole and look out. There reigned stillness broken only by the dull roar of the engines and the splash of the waves. The spray of sea-water used sometimes to reach our faces. We would stand for hours together breathing in the freshness of the vast open sea and often forget our prisoner-selves in the engrossing thoughts. Looking back we would find all prisoners dozing or half-asleep and in the corridor the placid figure of the slowly moving sentry with his rifle. The scene was horrid, strangely reminiscent of the galley slaves of centuries ago, over whose crushing toil and misery was raised the glory that was Greece.

Our Medical Officer on ship, finding that we were all feeling indisposed, ordered our escort to take us on the deck daily for sometime. We were accordingly hand-cuffed and marched to a corner of the deck every morning and evening. The free passengers stared at us and dared not talk for fear of





**The Cellular Jail Port Blair**  
 'We sighted a huge building exactly similar to  
 medieval castles.' (p. 37).



**The Jail Gate**  
 At the very jail gate we asked our European Jailor to take  
 us to our hunger-striking comrades' (p. 37).

the Police. The little children with their sparkling eyes would look at us with curiosity. How they reminded us of our little brothers and sisters whom we had left behind in our homes. They were growing with years but to us their memory was always of their childhood—of their smiles, their naughty pranks, their prattle. None of us had ever before been on a sea voyage. The sight therefore was so pleasing. In contrast to our limited cramped prison lives there was the view of the endless stretch of water, the rhythm of the waves, the white silvery clouds on the distant horizon. We requested our escort to give us a chance to see the sunrise but it could not be arranged.

On the fourth day we sighted land. Our ship was winding its course through small islets green with their covering of cocoanut trees. The landscape was beautiful. We all gathered at the peephole to gaze at the scenery. Soon the ship reached the Aberdeen Islands where the Cellular Jail for politicals was situated. The *Maharajah* anchored about a mile from the islands. We sighted a huge building exactly similar to medieval castles. We were told it was the jail for us. I instantly remembered England's manorial castles that had imprisoned many who were for the march of history against the decaying, parasitic feudalism. Capitalism triumphed but only to bolster up the monstrous feudalism in another region—the Indian soil.

We were getting impatient to be taken inside the jail to meet our comrades. My casemates were there—all excepting Mahabir. From Bengal and Bihar batches had already arrived. There were several amongst them who were my co-workers, with whom I had worked together against heavy odds. We had parted company five years ago, were tried and convicted as chance would have it, in sepa-



rate cases. There were others with whom we had no personal acquaintance but it did not matter, for we were all soldiers who had fought for the common cause and were now fortunately assembled in the enemy's fortress.

Our waiting seemed so long, when at last in a ferry boat we were taken to the small jetty of the island and driven in a motor lorry to the cellular jail. We gave our usual cries but there was no one except the authorities to hear them. The police had cleared the route of all other people. It feared disaffection in these remote islands too. For during the Civil Disobedience Campaign of 1930 the Congress message had reached this distant region also. There had been a demonstration by some people, the National Flag was hoisted, shouts of Gandhiji-ki-Jai had been raised. Promptly the Chief Commissioner—the uncrowned king of the settlement—had taken steps to suppress the movement. Several persons were arrested and thrown in jail.

At the very jail gate we asked the European jailor to take us to our hunger-striking comrades. He politely declined and instead arranged for our accommodation in the yard where the non-hunger-strikers were confined. We were placed in association with about twenty-five comrades. From them I learnt that several of them were to join the struggle within a few days and that four or five friends had been forced to stay out in view of their protracted illness.

We had decided to join the strike immediately and be by the side of our suffering comrades. But our friends in the yard dissuaded us and advised us to declare the strike only after having a talk with Colonel Barker, Inspector-General of Prisons, Punjab, who had been deputed by the Government of India

to report on the strike situation. He had arrived by the same boat as ourselves. We had not to wait for long, as Mr. Barker visited our yard the very first day. We discussed with him the demands of the hunger-strikers and the immediate possibilities. Without committing himself he talked freely with us all along. He knew us from Punjab; for he had served as the Medical Officer-in-Charge of our three hunger-strikes during the Lahore Conspiracy Case under-trial period. Strangely enough, at the close of the talk the Colonel left orders with the local authorities for locking me up separately from all the prisoners in a different yard.

I had a mind to refuse such confinement but when I learnt that I would be placed in yard No. 4 adjacent to yard No. 5 where the majority of the hunger-strikers had their cells, I at once agreed. I was told that I would thereby get the coveted chance of communicating with the strikers.

The same afternoon I was shifted to the new yard. Within half an hour I received a slip with a few lines on it scribbled in pencil. It was from my intimate comrade Kamalnath Tewari. He had sent me his warm greetings and asked me to write him immediately about the details of the agitation that he had expected to have developed in the country. The communication from my friend thrilled me. He was one of my best comrades. In our common party life outside, in Bihar, Bengal and Nepal we had lived and worked together amidst heavy odds and had ultimately been arrested, both of us in the Lahore Conspiracy Case. After I had received the note, how I craved to meet him and my other comrades. But where was the possibility? Comrades Kamalnath and Batukeshwar Dutta, were locked up in yard No. 7 away from all other people. They had

been held by the authorities as the prime movers behind the strike and consequently had been completely segregated. The rest of the hunger-strikers were in yard No. 5.

I had to be satisfied with the opportunity that I had received and I made the best of it. The same day that I was taken to my new yard, I managed to communicate with the hunger-strikers who were in yard No. 5. I informed them of the agitation that had started in the country and of the volume of growing protests. I told them how in a short and delayed, white-washing communique the government had at last reported the deaths of the three comrades. I also described how we had found a wave of sullen indignation all over the country, when we were leaving it. A Representative Andaman Committee had been formed and it was moving actively. Swami Gyananand had taken a bold initiative in the matter. These details had a very cheering effect on our friends. They felt so encouraged at the thought that henceforth the struggle would continue with the active sympathy and support of their people, that its developments were being anxiously watched and followed by their countrymen thousands of miles away from them.

I now intimated to them of our resolve of joining the strike immediately. They consulted amongst themselves and asked us to wait for a few days to await the final development of Col. Barker's visit. All along I was simultaneously in touch with my comrades in yard No. 7. In our mutual consultations we were readily helped by the ordinary prisoners, who carried messages, notes etc. They were full of sympathy for us and did not hesitate to face risks of punishments when helping us. The Pathan feeding gang had to do its work under coercion. One of the

Pathans was so sympathetic that after a few days he refused the gang work and himself resorted to hunger-strike in our support. The authorities declared him a case of mental aberration and on this plea repatriated him to the country.

After his stay of few days in the settlement Col. Barker returned to India, presumably to submit his report promptly to the Central Government. In the meantime the condition of four or five comrades had become critical. Wires were clicking. Telegraphic reports were being daily sent to Simla. Then one day all of a sudden came the Deputy Commissioner, with S.M.O.\* and many other high officials, and gave order for the strikers to be carried to the Central Tower. They were taken there on stretchers one after another, barring those few whose condition made it impossible to undergo the strain. The authorities then assured them that all their grievances would be removed and they would get necessary physical and cultural amenities. The details were also told. In the same breath, however, the officers said that nothing

tions amongst themselves and next with their hospital friends. That evening the strike was called off. To be doubly assured authorities made them drink milk, each one of them, in the presence of the officers. The hunger-strike was over. After full fifty-five days of struggle our comrades had emerged victorious.

It was late in the evening when the strike terminated. In my cell I passed that night restlessly awaiting the dawn; for I knew that the next day I was sure to meet my comrades. Meeting! After

\*Senior Medical Officer.

such tremendous suffering and struggle, after such a long time! The very thought of it put me in raptures. But I was disappointed. There were some restrictions enforced now on the hunger-strikers on medical grounds. I had, therefore, to wait for a few days before I could be in their midst.

At last the day so keenly awaited came and our jailor escorted us to yard No. 5. Our comrades had all assembled at the yard gate and as soon as we entered through it, there was a great rush. To warm handshakes and embraces there seemed no ending. I went through it all as if I was in a dream. When I grew calm after the lapse of some time, I drew aside my friend Kamalnath and began hearing from him the full story of the hunger-strike. The struggle had just ended and as the circumstances were, we could not join it. It afforded me immense pleasure, therefore, to learn all the details of the heroic fight that had been waged. For full two days I listened to the narrative from my friend and it is from this information in the main that the next chapter of 'Resistance' has been written.

## CHAPTER II

### RESISTANCE

Comrades Kamalnath, Batukeshwar Dutta, Mahabir Singh, Kundanlal and Dr. Gaya Prasad—all prisoners of the Lahore Conspiracy Case were brought down to the Madras Penitentiary from the different jails of the province and deported to Andamans in January 1933. On reaching Port Blair, the first few days they passed quite unmindful of the jail routine and its special local rigours. From morning till evening they were moving in the midst of their comrades. There seemed no end to making happy acquaintances and exchanging news. Of several of the comrades, they had learnt before. There was Haripado Bhattacharjee, yet in his teens, who had escaped gallows for his being too young when arrested for Ahsanullah murder. He was taken to his village home and in his presence his old father was tied to a bamboo post in a corner of the courtyard. The cottage, their home, was then set on fire. As a result of indiscriminate assaults, Haripado's condition had become precarious. He had almost lost one of his eyes. They met Bimal Das Gupta of the Villers Shooting Case. It is well known how in his case the defence produced evidence of the merciless assault that had caused grave injuries all over his body. The stories of the different comrades were not much dissimilar in this respect. Many had permanent marks of brutal assaults. There was only one difference that while cases of some had come prominently

before the public eye, the details of others were little known. But such has been the record of all revolutionary struggles in the history. Thousands have fought and perished, unwept, unhonoured, and unsung. It is hard to describe how happy and privileged they felt in the company of these comrades who were till yesterday known and unknown warriors for them. Today they have become dear loving companions. There was however no opportunity of meeting the comrades who had been placed by the government in 'B' class and accommodated in a yard separated from them. As has been said earlier they were all in 'C' class and had consequently been accommodated in a yard reserved for 'C' class prisoners. Little did they know at that time that they would soon meet most of the Division II comrades in the unique and happy association of a life-and-death struggle—the First Hunger-Strike.

After the flush of their meetings was over with the lapse of a few days, they began to settle down and learn first-hand of the life that awaited them in their new Port Blair Jail. When they were deported by the government they expected the worst conditions and a most vindictive treatment. And they found they were right. The conditions were almost the same as in the Great War days when in those very dark cells were caged hundreds of our revolutionary comrades—the sturdy Sikhs—members of the Ghadar Party, and the flower of Bengal youth. From these members of our old guards, none could expect a submission to governmental tyranny, for they were people who had conceived and prepared for a national insurrection in those days when the majority of our national leaders thought traditionally in terms of compromise and concessions. They were the pioneers of our national revolutionary struggle.

But they had failed. Many of them mounted the gallows. Of the rest a large number had been arrested and marched to prison. But they had entered the jail walls armed with the dash and daring that defied all force, that challenged all oppression. It was a futile attempt on the part of the jail authorities to terrorise them by their extreme repression. It only afforded the prisoners an opportunity to carry on with redoubled force the struggle that they had waged outside. Heroically they fought as long as they were confined in the Andamans. From defensive tactics of their early prison days, they later advanced to an offensive. All jail rules were broken. They declared themselves to be free to observe only such practices in their daily life as they considered compatible with their dignity and self-respect. The authorities were blinded by the brute force that they possessed. There were floggings and frequent assaults on the prisoners. But our comrades did not flinch. They were not votaries of non-violence and so whenever they got chances they too beat the high officials. But such opportunities were rare, as the officers moved inside the jail premises always under the protection of heavy guards. Hunger-strikes were resorted to and continued for months. In course of one such protracted strike, comrade Ramrakha laid down his life. Some prisoners were kept locked up inside their dark cells for months together and their condition had become precarious. Several Bengali youths turned insane. The story of these years of increasing governmental repression and the valiant struggles waged by our comrades did not reach the country, and our people got their glimpses only from the pages of the memoirs written years later by some of the released prisoners.



So my friends had this glorious tradition established by their Andaman predecessors. They had to uphold it. The government had completed its side of the picture and it was for them to fill up the other side. It did not take them long to follow the footsteps of comrade Ramrakha and others.

The sufferings and privations that were forced on them had no limits. Their number was about a hundred and as has been said earlier they were accommodated in two different yards as Division Two and Division Three prisoners. The jail as its name signified was composed entirely of cellular blocks. The huge brick building was old and dilapidated, with crevices in its walls everywhere. In all the yards the roofs leaked whenever it rained. The cells were dark and dingy, with extremely rough, uncemented damp floors. The cells on the ground-floor were the worst. Even in day time it remained dark. Passing their days in these insanitary and unlighted cells, many of the comrades had fallen victims to recurring Malaria. The 'C' class comrades lying on their wooden boards on the cold floor of their cells were exposed to mosquito bites all through their sleepless nights. These tropical islands were reputed for their heavy annual mortality from malaria. During the long hours of the night the 'C' class prisoners felt extremely restless.

Despite repeated requests lanterns were not allowed. These were considered articles of luxury. Dozing on their boards the prisoners often woke up startled, as there were numerous scorpions and other insects inside the damp crevices and these frequently crawled out in the dark, and sometimes bit the prisoners. At such times the only help could be afforded by the corridor warder who used to be on duty with

a lantern. But these people took their cue from the ways and methods of their superiors. They had understood that the political prisoners were to be maltreated in all possible manners. Therefore they would sit comfortably in some corner of the long corridor without responding to their calls. The Chief Warder was an old employee. He had been one of the warders who had carried out the vindictive policy of the Great War days towards our old comrades. He had consequently gained popularity amongst the officers and was now a titled servant of the British Government—a Rai Saheb.

To this type of accommodation was added the climate of the islands. It was of an enervating and depressing nature. For nine months in the year it rained in these parts of the tropics. For weeks together the sun would not be visible. Cold winds and constant drizzling would make the weather cheerless. Our comrades would be sitting in a corner of their gloomy cells. It became so dark sometimes that they were deprived of their only privilege and recreation—the chance to devote their time to studies. The atmosphere was also humid and it produced an adverse effect on their nerves that were already strained.

In small islands surrounded by the sea, it is usually a problem to supply sufficient fresh drinking water to the inhabitants. But they were prisoners sent to exile. The government had not cared to think of such trifles—the elementary needs of human life. The water supply was scanty and irregular. In two yards there were only two water taps which were opened for a few hours in the day. From these taps they had to get water for their kitchen, drinking, bathing and washing purposes. But how could they? As a sequel they had to suffer daily.

Some of them went without bath, and their wretched meals too could not be served at regular hours. Even the little supply, that they eventually had, was not properly filtered and as a consequence, dysentery, constipation and thread-worms were becoming general complaints.

The less said about the medical department, the better. It could aptly be described as being conspicuous for having no arrangements. Some of the subordinates on whom fell the task of attending to their needs were humorously called by them 'Ghorah Daktar' ('Horse doctors') for the way in which they applied their art of healing on them. These licensed medical-degree holders had, it seemed, enormous faith in some medicines—almost as if they were Talismans. Before the prisoners had even spoken of their trouble, out came their marked talisman bottles from a wooden carrier. The active prisoner-compounder poured out promptly in a small metal cup some coloured liquid and our friends were asked to gulp it in. The doctors did not think it necessary to hear them and diagnose the trouble. Not unoften had they abused the doctors for their callous treatment but things did not improve. Most of them therefore had resigned themselves to their developing diseases and stopped bringing it to the notice of the medical people.

The attitude of the doctors did not appear to be something new, for during confinement in different jails it had been found that the jail doctors, barring a few, were a type in themselves, that is almost a disgrace to their noble and humanitarian profession. Instead of considering themselves fortunate in getting a chance to serve the suffering and forsaken humanity inside prison walls, they felt themselves as part of the ordinary jail administrative machinery whose policy

it was to inflict all possible hardships on the helpless prisoners, already oppressed under the stringent jail rules. In our jail life several times we had discussed and pointed out to some doctors this deplorable aspect of their conduct, but we always met with a cold indifference. They replied that they had no alternative but to acquiesce in the prison regime.

My friends could never forget the type of meals that they had to swallow these days. The 'C' class prisoners in the morning were given a cup of rice 'Lapsi' i.e., coarse rice boiled in water. Even sufficient salt was not added to it. This delicious morning meal, they had to forego for most of the days, as in it they had to make do with the very sight of what they had. At noon they were served with rice and chapatis with curry and Dal. But all these dishes need description for a correct appraisal. The islands had a very poor soil. There was little growth of good vegetables that were reserved for the use of a few dozen officers of the Settlement. For prisoners' rations vegetables meant greens—that too inedible leaves, with a lot of thick tasteless stalks. The so-called Dal was just like rain water from a muddy pool, no trace of grams was to be found in it. Rice and chapatis were of the worst quality. There was the choice of taking both half and half—or any one thing exclusively. But it was difficult to make a choice. Flour, rice, vegetables, spices—all things big and small, were brought to the islands from India at long intervals, by the government-chartered ship. It was then stored in the godowns. By the time it reached the jail, most of the things were full of worms. Atta, rice and Dal—all three main items of the diet—were of a quality that could be given for human consumption only at the risk of spreading disease. The chapatis

made of flour abounding in worms tasted bitter. From rice that was boiled would pop up the long thread-like dead bodies of worms. The very sight would be nauseating. Our comrades had therefore ceased looking at their meals when taking them. Yet they did not escape the sight of some of them every day. Such comrades would leave their meals in the middle and go away hungry. Those who continued eating understood the sudden departure of their friends but never questioned. They were all young men of petty bourgeois-intelligentsia with their own notions of respectability. A convention had grown up that they should be silent on such occasions. It hurt their susceptibility to be complaining to each other for such petty things of their lives. But how long could they starve? Such things could not be endured all along. They were all getting ready to fight, and fight to the end. The evening meals were again of the same quality as of the noontime—a cup of Dal, a little green and chapatis.

In Indian jails of the different provinces, wherever they were confined, they had never been given any hard jail task. But now they were all in Andamans and the authorities had been pleased to detect special talent in them for 'Ban-making' i.e., coir-work. They were allotted this task and with its non-fulfilment they were being threatened with punishments.

A political prisoner values above all the cultural facilities that he has in his daily life. In the midst of extreme physical hardships he can carry on if only he is provided with reading and writing facilities and gets periodically the news of the world outside. The government by its experience knew full well of this aspect of their lives, and it had therefore taken all precautions to put obstacles in this sphere. Having been deported hurriedly from jails in the country my

friends had been able to take with them only a limited number of books. They had thought that as usual they would be replenishing their stock of books by regular purchases. But in Andamans they were not allowed any more to have deposit money in the jail office and use it for purchase of books and magazines. When they asked the jail authorities, to supply them with books themselves, they met with a flat refusal. They suffered most from deprivation of newspapers. In India everywhere 'B' class prisoners were getting papers at government cost. But in Andamans they were given none. Deported to a place, hundreds of miles away from their country they were literally dying for a little news of the progress of their national movement but there were no rumours even to cross the high jail walls.

In this scheme of things, it was foolish to expect any facilities for recreation like games, etc. They were never allowed even to move out of their respective yards. Near the Central Tower where one end of all the yards converged, there was a little opening. Lest they should have even a glimpse of anything outside their yard, this place was covered with high corrugated tin sheets. Within their yard they had to remain all along. Prisoners of Division II and Division III were not allowed to meet each other. In the evening they wished to do a little walking within their own yard. But there was no opportunity. The lock-up was over long before the sun set. In some Indian jails prisoners used to have 'a mule or two of walking' inside their pucca cells but this practice too could not be resumed in dark cells when the fear of treading on a scorpion or some other crawling creature always haunted them.

Since they had reached Port Blair their letters also had been stopped. They mysteriously disappeared on

the way or were lost in the local office. Some parcels that were sent for them shared the same fate. They were never even informed of them. Later they learnt that the contents had been thrown away or conveniently disposed of.

These were some of the features of the daily life in which our comrades were placed, but to cap it all was the attitude of the authorities. It was vindictive and callous to the extreme and the political prisoners too did not expect it to be otherwise. But what hurt them was their vulgar manners and singular lack of courtesy. The officers would in their treatment with them even depart from established norms of a gentleman's conduct. The arrogant and haughty officers were of course paid back in their own coins but our comrades certainly preferred to enjoy fighting them hard in a sportsman's spirit. These were however vain wishes. The officers were there always seeking opportunities to heap indignities and humiliations on the prisoners.

Under such conditions of life a sullen atmosphere prevailed when the batch from Madras reached Andamans. A fight would have been precipitated long ago but for the restraining of younger elements by their more experienced and elder comrades. The latter argued that there was no public opinion in the locality to support them. News would hardly leak out to reach in time their countrymen beyond the ocean. In view of these facts the struggle would be of a sustained and stubborn character. No hasty action was therefore advisable. In cooler moments all our comrades recognised this situation but under extreme provocation it often seemed that some comrades would lose their patience. It was with great difficulty that they could be calmed and their sporadic outbursts avoided.

This state of affairs could not last long. All the comrades sensed the necessity of a planned fight but were not definite as to the form and method of the struggle. The treatment that was meted out to them, particularly to the Division III prisoners was intolerable.

With the arrival of the new Madras batch the discussions took definite shape. In Indian jails comrades Kamal, Dutt and their other casemates had to go on hunger-strikes repeatedly and for long periods. The Lahore Hunger-strike in the privileged company of their late comrade Jotin had proved so effective to rouse public opinion and to force partial surrender of the unwilling government. So now they readily started discussing the launching of a hunger-strike. For several days general discussions were held. Views were exchanged as to what would be the demands, how best they could conduct the strike, at what stage the calling off could be considered, what would be the nature of an honourable settlement. Keen interest was evinced by everyone, for it was realised that under the peculiar Andaman conditions, the strike would last long and victory could be assured only after the death of several of them. They were soldiers planning an attack and their talks were most lively. Comrades who were usually of a silent type also came forward with their suggestions and actively participated in the formulation of the plan. It was a problem, however, how to establish regular communication with the Division II comrades and have necessary consultations with them. A way was finally found out through sick comrades. They were confined in the jail hospital and there both Division II and Division III people were together. Almost everyday some comrades were discharged to return to their yard, while fresh patients were admitted.



The ailing friends became the messengers.

In course of the discussions there were some interesting political speculations. A view was advanced that there would be a settlement very soon between the Congress and the Government, and then the question of political prisoners would stand on a different plane. The fight was therefore to be postponed. They must wait and see. Most of them, however, did not share these illusions and felt that it was now or never. They had just been brought to the islands. The Government had taken the offensive. Either they were to go down before it and lead humiliating lives for years with no cultural and physical amenities, or they were to accept the challenge and fight, till they had their rights and privileges established.

When the fight was eventually decided a small committee was formed to go through the preliminaries. A written representation was sent to the Government narrating the grievances and enumerating the demands. They waited for some time but there was no reply. Instead, the jail superintendent gave them, apparently under instructions from the Chief Commissioner, some vague assurances. They had enough experience to correctly understand these moves of the authorities. From their side they promptly gave now an ultimatum of a month.

The political prisoners were all now so happy, counting days to launch their resistance. They would greet each other with a smile so significant and full of meaning. Was not their period of suspense over? They were now free to move forward.

On the fixed day, thirty-three of them started the hunger-strike. It was May 1933. There were some more comrades who wanted to join on the very first day but they were advised to wait and come in later. The struggle had begun. The officers were running

to and fro, looking perplexed at the concerted attack. The first thing that they did was to get all the strikers locked up in the first and second floors of yard No. 5. Three of them had the bad luck to be separated from the rest. Comrades Kamal, Dutta and Shukla were taken to a different yard and locked up in cells, one in each wing. A fourth comrade was brought in a few days later. Their four cells were so widely apart that they could not even shout out to each other. They felt so bitterly the deprivation of association from their other comrades but there was no way out. The higher officials considered them to be at the root of the trouble and were therefore especially attentive and 'kind' to them. For two whole months they had to pass their days in dark cells, with only bits of news of the strike developments filtering in from time to time. The lock-up for all the strikers was for day and night, all through the protracted period of the struggle. The same was the punishment meted out to the large number of comrades who had declared 'work-strike' and were accommodated in the ground-floor of yard No. 3. Over and above, heavy fetters were imposed on them. In their cells the strikers had little that could be called their kit. That too was now seized and carried away by the jail people, after a thorough search. The jail blanket, a wooden plank, their jangia and kurta were all that were left with them. The Division II prisoners who were amongst them were instantly declassified and locked up as others. It was so welcome to them. Their classification had been a *distinction forced on them*, which they had ever felt.

The settlement doctors were completely unnerved. They had no previous experience of hunger-strike and were at their wits' end. But the senior medical officer, an European gentleman, moved about

with an air of indifference and nonchalance. He wanted to 'teach a lesson', so the political prisoners were told. Forced feeding in Indian jails usually begins late, when the hunger-striker becomes weak and is physically disabled to offer stiff resistance. Following the death of Jotin, the Inspectors-General of Prisons of the different provinces had held a conference and had laid down this definite rule. But the medical authorities at Port Blair were perhaps not aware of it. They started feeding on the sixth day. Several doctors divided themselves in batches in the early morning and followed by their respective gangs of Pathan prisoners, entered the cells one after another and began their work.

Two doctors and a gang entered the cell of comrade Mahabir Singh. He was a typical Thakur of U. P.—one of our stoutest friends. His broad chest tall figure, flowing beard that he had grown of late, all reminded one of the brave Rajputs—the heroes whose annals fill the pages of Todd's 'Rajasthan'. He was a born soldier and was recognised as such at the very first sight. Of his physical achievements he had made a record in his outside party life with us.

The doctors found it a difficult task to get Mahabir overpowered. For long he struggled with the Pathans till by sheer exhaustion he fell down on the ground. The doctors thought that it could be easy now to force feeding on him. They did not know Mahabir. It was his eighth or ninth hunger-strike. He knew all the arts of baffling medical people and refuse feeding. Only an expert hand could tackle him. But the doctors were complete novices in the matter. They started the feeding process in a crude manner. When the tube was inserted, Mahabir resisted vigorously and coughed hard. The tube was thus transferred into the wind-

pipe from the gullet. Pouring of milk began down-right and it went straight into the lungs. Only a hunger-striker knows what superhuman courage and endurance is necessary to keep silent at such times and invite sure death. But had they not decided that some of them must die and pave the way for victory? Our Mahabir also was a party to this resolve and he led the way. The feeding had hardly been finished when his pulse was fast dropping and he had lost consciousness. His lungs had been filled with milk. The doctors had not realised the full gravity of the situation but they sensed danger and immediately removed Mahabir to hospital on a stretcher. When he was being removed, the comrades who were in the adjacent cells got alarmed and cried out to their neighbours. They all shouted for the doctors to learn the exact condition of Mahabir. But none replied. Only the solitary warder on duty came and said, "Babu, ap log ka bhai bimar ho gaya hai." But it was enough. As by intuition they felt that Mahabir was leaving them. Would they not get an opportunity of giving a last revolutionary farewell to their departing comrade? Years ago in Lahore when Jotin died in hunger-strike, we had this privilege granted. Jotin had breathed his last in our arms, amidst his comrades with whom he had pledged together 'Victory or Death.' No relatives were near him—but we were there, his brothers, his comrades-in-arms, to bid him adieu. We were allowed to carry the bier too, to the jail gate where stood over a lakh of our people, silent and bareheaded to pay their homage.

But our callous Andaman authorities had their standards. They did not know of chivalry in a fight. Political prisoners were not even told that Mahabir was expiring. That whole day everyone passed rest-

less hours. By evening it was believed that Mahabir had gone. He had followed Ramrakha. The comrades on work-strike had grown terribly excited. When they were gathered for meals they refused to be locked up until jail officers came and gave them full authoritative reports of Mahabir's end. The authorities were in a dilemma. They sensed the defiant mood of these comrades and feared great trouble. It was not that the prisoners were unaware of this aspect. They had discussed it. They expected there might be shooting—a second Hijli—and they were prepared for it. The authorities threatened, and with the use of least possible force by their hundreds of warders, they forced a lock-up. There were scuffles, assaults. Some of our comrades were injured.

The strikers used to raise slogans daily at 8 o'clock. That night it was memorable. Long before the scheduled time they were standing—one and all, even the weakest of them—at the doors of their cells. Complete silence reigned. Just as the jail gong sounded eight, up went their voices—loud and resonant—‘Inquilab Zindabad.’ The echo had not yet died. The air was rent again—‘Inquilab Zindabad.’ In front was stretched the vast expanse of blue water. In the distance were visible the shining lights of the Island King's palace—the Chief Commissioner's bungalow. For the third time they roared ‘Inquilab Zindabad.’ Then all was again silent. They felt thrilled. They had given their revolutionary salutations to their departed comrade.

The nation has hoisted the flag of revolt. Fighting under the banner many of their comrades had fallen in the past. To-day Mahabir also had perished. Many more will die to-morrow, till our goal is reached. On that day the nation will remember its martyrs. The flag shall be flying high. Our victorious people will

rend the air with their thundering cries, 'Inquilab Zindabad.' Such are our revolutionary struggles, their beginning and end. There was no end to such thoughts with which they lay awake during that long night.

To this day it is not known definitely what happened to Mahabir in the hospital and how he was treated during the last moments of his life. When the strike had terminated we heard a report that his dead body was tied to heavy stones and sunk in the sea in dark hours of the morning. No wreaths were laid, no funeral orations delivered, the dead body that the nation would have treasured and worshipped went down in the ocean to be the food of sharks. I recalled how Mahabir's intimate comrade, Sirdar Bhagat Singh too, had, some years ago, received at Government's hands, such honour and treatment after his death. The coincidence was not strange.

The struggle now became more grim. After Mahabir's death everyday the strikers had additions to their ranks. New comrades joined the hunger-strike. The number went up from day to day till it reached over fifty.

During one of these early days came a telegram from Santiniketan from Dr. Tagore imploring them to abandon hunger-strike. But how could it be possible? The Government was as adamant as ever, while they had already lost one of them. They were not thinking now of any compromise or settlement. The question primarily had become one of upholding the prestige of Indian Revolutionaries; and they had staked their lives on it. They, therefore, felt touched by the expression of solicitude but were unable to respond to the appeal and discontinue the strike. A proper reply was drafted and sent but they did not know whether it reached the destination.

Days now dragged on. The officers would come to them and would relate cock-and-bull stories, some to intimidate them, others to persuade them to give up the strike. It was all futile and only afforded them some amusement. From cell to cell they passed on these stories and made fun of their inventors.

The S.M.O. was now moved in his complacency. Outwardly he maintained his previous 'don't care' attitude but at the bottom he had grown nervous. He knew that he would be held responsible for giving the strikers the opportunity of courting death and thus causing widespread agitation in the country. He had now given detailed instructions to his subordinates, and personally supervised the feeding everyday. Serious cases he would see himself, and their number was growing. The number of the daily forced feeds had now been increased to three, and in some cases, to four. Some of the strikers were waked up in the middle of the night and had to undergo the torture of forced feeding at the hands of the doctor and his Pathan gang.

In view of the Government's attitude, as manifested by their local agents, our comrades realised that one death was not sufficient. Some more would have to follow. Most of them were trying and eventually two of them, their young comrades—Mohit and Mohan resisted successfully. The Mahabir episode was repeated. Milk was poured in their lungs. But the doctors got scent in time, and stopped feeding. Only a little milk could get in. But that was enough. The news went round that two more comrades were leaving them. Everyone of them on getting the report pledged solemnly that matters would not rest there. More dead bodies shall float in the ocean. The Government shall have to bend on its knees.

Mohit and Mohan were removed to hospital. With the help of repeated injections and oxygen they were kept alive for a few days. But had they not determined their path? Their iron will triumphed. Death, glorious death slowly covered their lives and took them away from the midst of their comrades. They had gone to the realm of martyrs, leaving the rest to carry on the battle. One remembered history. Was it not in such spirits that the Greeks fought, two thousand years ago, in their narrow pass and thundered, "They shall not pass."?

Unlike Mahabir, Mohit and Mohan were both short-term prisoners. They had only short periods left of their sentences. But they were youngmen from Bengal and we know how in recent history Bengalee youth had heroically braved death with philosophic calm that earned admiration and tribute even from some of their implacable foes. History was written with their life-blood, as an inspiring and glorious record of our revolutionary struggle.

In their normal jail life Mohit and Mohan both were marked for their jovial and at the same time serious temperament. To this day their numerous friends remember vividly their smiles—so innocent and childlike, and the sweet voice of Mohit in which he entertained people with his Hindustani Ghazals.

A month had now passed and the strikers were quite in the dark about the developments in the country. They did not know even whether their news was reaching their people. The authorities had now, however, a clear change of attitude. They felt that things had gone too far, and a settlement was expedient. The Government of India, the prisoners learnt, had demanded explanation from the Chief Commissioner regarding the cause of three deaths within a single month.



Then one day, they were told that Col. Barker the I. G. of Prisons of the Punjab, deputed by the Govt. of India, was arriving to visit them. For the Lahore case prisoners he was an old acquaintance considered by the Government to have grown into a hunger-strike expert through his experiences of three group strikes in the Lahore jail. On his arrival he was closeted for long with the higher officers and, as was learnt later, had drawn up on this occasion the terms of a settlement. But when he saw the strikers, he bore a rigid adamant attitude, to hide his real purpose. To yard No. 7, where four comrades were locked up, he went and greeting them with an ironic smile, remarked, "So you have started your old game." Instantly they retorted, "As long as the treatment would be based on inhuman principles, within the jail walls there shall be no peace." He kept silent and turned back. That day he ordered drinking water to be stopped. For twenty-four hours none of the hunger-strikers were given a single drop of water. Some of them were lying already in precarious condition and there were others who had blood-pressure trouble. At the close of the period two or three of them were removed to hospital in an unconscious state. The S. M. O. who was formally responsible for them, it was reported, asserted himself and got the order hastily rescinded. Colonel Barker got convinced that nothing would deter the strikers and that the only way to terminate the strike was to offer honourable terms.

The colonel as I have said earlier lost no time in conveying his impressions to the India Government which now abandoned its adamant attitude and yielded to the prisoners.

The hunger-strikers had triumphed in their cause. at what cost? This was the question uppermost

in my mind when my friend Kamalnath finished relating this gripping narrative of their struggle. That night when I retired to bed I was still thinking. Had we been losers in the bargain? Three of our lives had been given up to secure victory. But my comrades knew it before and had entered the fight with this clear prospect before them. Then where was the room for doubt or hesitation? My thoughts would not have travelled in this direction, had I not remembered the arguments and views of a considerable section of my countrymen that radically differed from us. These people were mostly active fighters of our national ranks. Their opinion rightly had a claim to our serious consideration and respect. On my mind's floor I was, therefore, engaged in a debate with them, refuting their arguments. They said that such fights should be avoided, that our lives were precious and should be preserved for the outside struggle. They also advised us not to be desperate or restive. But this whole approach was wrong and based on wrong premises.

The broad struggle that is waged outside in the country cannot be severed from the struggle that we carried on behind the prison walls from time to time because the two are indissolubly linked together. Even

to be consistent anti-Imperialist fighters. Whenever the prison struggles assume a broad form they clearly assist and advance the country's battle. Who can argue that the strike of Jotin and others at Lahore, and later the mass hunger-strike in the Andamans and other jails did not form distinct parts of the national struggle? The talk of preservation of lives had no meaning if we examine the question more closely. Life is preserved not with a spirit of cling-

ing to it, but to offer it to the service of our cause. We were but units of the millions of our fighting forces. Only through our active uncompromising struggle and sacrifices we could best advance our cause. It is but inevitable that on the march thousands shall perish, that the millions may live and triumph. By no logic it can be proved that in the specific situation of the Andaman strike we had erred because we did not calculate. Mahabir, Mohit and Mohan—the valiant trio had a clear vision. They did not fight for a bed-sheet or a pair of dhotis or any like material object. They had stood for a principle—the principle of never yielding to Government's repression, and had vindicated it with their lives. By their deaths they have inspired and galvanised thousands of their suffering countrymen to march forward to heroic and determined action. They never threw their lives away. They offered it at the highest price. In Freedom's Battle there is no place for the cool calculations of a bania. The revolutionary soldiers have their own measure. Without knowing it and realising it, it is impossible to judge properly the supreme actions of their lives. Before us we have the glorious spectacle of Republican Spain of to-day, where hundreds of famous leaders, writers, statesmen are falling in the trenches side by side with the illiterate but gallant peasants. Many people say that the former had done a wrong. They should have lived to serve the cause better. But Ralph Fox and others who have fallen thought otherwise. Then, were they wrong?

To say that Mahabir and his comrades were goaded to action through desperation is the most unfair view of their struggle. Desperation could lead to sudden organised assaults, or to endeavours for escape, but never to the slow march—inch by inch—towards certain death. With such arguments I went

to sleep late that night and woke up next morning to find most of my comrades in yard No. 5 already gathered in their respective wings, learning from each other experiences of the past days and discussing the developments. We were also eagerly awaiting our breakfast. It was our first common meal after victory, and we were jubilant.

## CHAPTER III

### THE MORROW

The morrow of a victory is always so pleasant. Besides, we were in jail with enough leisure to make merry and enjoy the fruits of the triumphant struggle. After the termination of the strike, the four comrades had been brought back to yard No. 5 from their segregation yard. The movements of all the erstwhile strikers were still restricted, not on penal grounds this time but for medical reasons. They were in a very weak state of health and the doctors confined them even during day time, to their respective wings. They had taken precautions regarding the diet and were giving them only liquid diet and some slices of bread. Our strike comrades, however, wanted to taste articles seasoned with salt and spices, and they found out a way. From the upper floor they would drop a small rope and pull up with its help a chapati and a little curry. There would be a rush and lo! In the twinkling of an eye everything disappeared. A single chapati would be shared among a dozen or more of them. They remained many who did not get their share. They waited and looked for another opportunity. The device was followed again. The restrictions from the side of the doctors could continue only for a few days.

Amidst laughter and merriment we were passing our time. Those of us who were younger and rather mischievous hatched some plan everyday and selected fresh victims from amongst us, as the objects of

their pranks. The strike—the strike—  
 during the strike—the strike—  
 sion II comrades] and comrades  
 still continuing. Formal order the day  
 had not yet come. They were  
 the Chief Commissioner's  
 in a hurry. We were on the  
 mood, enjoying our days in  
 were breathing a communitarian  
 jail after years, many of us  
 conviction. I have determined  
 had come after prominent  
 of the Presidency. One  
 similar story to the  
 fallen too often to  
 majority of us concerned  
 part of it had come  
 during the 1931  
 governmental  
 exception. There  
 political prisoners  
 were inflicted on a  
 one expired,  
 produced an  
 desired. The  
 trained and  
 continued for as long  
 confined in this  
 penal day and  
 punishment was  
 but often  
 been  
 But we had  
 government's

After  
 long list of

ment were smarting under the sense of a defeat. And to maintain a show of prestige they had ordered most of the privileges to be given, not as a concession to political prisoners but as reforms in the general treatment of all. To us this step was very welcome, for the hunger-strike thus inadvertently brought about betterment in the lot of ordinary prisoners also, whose grievances otherwise the officers would never have heard or redressed.

Those of us who were in 'C' class were henceforth to be provided with bedsheets, mosquito-nets, pillows and pillow cases, bathing towels and wooden bed-steads. We could also at our own cost purchase shorts and vests. As for diet, the quality of rice, flour and vegetable was improved. Provision was also made to vary dal daily and issue potatoes and onions as extra vegetables. Fish also was to be supplied whenever available, on alternate days. Kitchens were left in our hands for proper arrangement and supervision. We were allowed to purchase some food articles barring luxuries. The rest of the privileges were for all of us, irrespective of Division II or III. Maintaining the classification of the Indian jails, a new class for us was formed here. A term was coined for us—P.I., i.e., permanently incarcerated prisoners. We were so called because unlike ordinary Andaman prisoners, we were to be confined permanently within the cellular jail walls. For the ordinary convicts, the practice was three months confinement, after the expiry of which period they were taken out, to live and work on the settlement.

For our recreation, arrangements were made both for indoor and outdoor games. Carrom board, chess, playing cards and ping-pong were provided. For outdoor exercise we were given football and volleyball. Parallel and horizontal bars were fixed up for physical

exercise.

What made our life most intolerable previously was the complete absence of any scope for an intellectual and cultural development. Of the new facilities that we obtained, we valued most those pertaining to this sphere. We had now the right to subscribe magazines, both Indian and foreign, that were on the government's prescribed list. We could also receive books in parcels from our friends and relatives, and also purchase them from our money deposited at the jail gate. The government were to provide us with furniture for a prison library and reading room. Periodically books were also to be purchased by them. Lights were now being supplied in all the cells till ten in the night. At government expense the weekly overseas, *Statesman*, *The Times Illustrated Weekly*, the Bengali weeklies—*Sanjibani* and *Bangabasi*, as also the Hindi edition of the latter were to be supplied.

All punishments were withdrawn. Our Division II comrades went back to their yard, but henceforth we were not deprived of their association. Under new regulations we could freely meet them as inter-yard communication was allowed. Our previous lock-up time had made any recreation in the evening hours impossible. Now the time was altered to 8 p. m.

Above all, the attitude of the jail officers had undergone a radical change. In their dealing with us, we now did not find any lack of courtesy. We had no more to face indignities in our daily life. And it was no mean achievement. Thousands of our people have been in the prisons in recent years and they know how soulless has been the whole administrative machinery. It had no regard for any human aspect of the prisoners' lives. On the other hand all the



rules and regulations were so framed as to force on them humiliation from morning till evening. It has been our common experience that the greatest suffering caused has been mental and not physical; for, a political prisoner can endure extreme material hardships cheerfully without a murmur, but to be forced to live under humiliating circumstances even with the best of privileges, proves so acutely distressing to him. When we hear that in some remote prison one of our comrades has staked his life demanding something that appears so light and trivial to the common eye, we must probe deeper and see things in the background. His demand is a mere superficial feature, his fight in reality is a revolt against the whole system that suffocates and chokes him to a living death. He stands up and fights for the principle of human worth and dignity. In my long years of jail life, whenever I had been forced to fight the authorities I have been often summoned by the jail superintendents and sometimes the Inspector-General who questioned me. Hearing me they have always, without exception, said something like, 'Oh! you people are too touchy. In jails you must be thick-skinned.' At such an observation I was not surprised. For, how could they—the members of the bureaucracy, read the minds of those who had struggled and suffered for their country's freedom?—a freedom that was to assure for every citizen a free, happy and prosperous life. An advanced political worker does not limit his views to the narrow vision of mere material hardships of his countrymen, but he is also concerned with the colossal human frustration in the spiritual sphere. How can then one expect him, who appreciates life at its real worth, to submit meekly to an order of things that denies him all these values? In my college days Abbott's 'Life of Napo-

leon' had been one of my favourite books. In it I had read of the last days of Napoleon in St. Helena, when he was no more the redoubtable king of Revolutionary France but only an humbled prisoner of European reaction. In my prison days I never forgot one of the stories that I had read there. Napoleon—the hero of a hundred battles of Europe, was feeling life too dull in his lonely island. He wished for horse riding to get some relief and distraction. After long correspondence the permission was received. Napoleon was so happy. But when that evening he went round on his horse-back, he found himself escorted and spied by mounted guards. Such were the orders. Napoleon returned at once and entered his solitary room. That night his anguish had no end. He felt his self-respect trampled ruthlessly. As a protest Napoleon took a resolve. He never went out again for horse-riding. There are several such incidents which Abbot portrays with his powerful pen, to show how Napoleon who had once defied the might of the whole European autocracy, now found himself helpless, and slowly went down before his enemy's assaults. No physical blow could go deeper. His very soul was pierced. It may be said to us—the prisoners coming from the ordinary ranks of society—that it is no use recalling the stories from the life of one who was once the crowned ruler of the destinies of millions of people. But why? How can one deny us the right of claiming equality with the greatest of the great as did Tolstoy's common soldier of 'War and Peace' lying wounded in the battle field and gazing at the vast starlit sky.

In short, our life now had been made tolerable. We could exist physically and mentally. Since trouble was brewing from January last no fresh batch of prisoners had come from the country. Now that

things were settled, government resumed its practice of deporting more of our comrades. One day from our second floor, we witnessed a large contingent of mounted and ordinary police outside the jail, patrolling both sides of the road leading to the jetty. It was a welcome sign for us. We knew that more of our comrades were coming. We instantly prepared to give them a reception. A large number of comrades came from Bengal that day. Many had been deported as a result of their own persistent efforts. They had preferred exile in association with us than enjoying privileges in Indian jails. They had come prepared to meet the hard repressive conditions of pre-strike days. They had no information of the latest developments. We, therefore, sprang a pleasant surprise on them when we played a football match in their honour that evening. The ground was in their quarantine yard and they watched the game from the first and second floors where they were confined. This group was later followed by many more batches, till at the last stage our number had swelled up to three hundred.

Before the strike days, there was constant tension in the atmosphere. We were preparing for the fight and consequently the circumstances were not conducive to our free mixing with each other. Besides, with Division II prisoners, we had not even a chance of communication. We had come from Bihar, U.P., Bengal, Madras and Assam—from different stages of the movement, with diverse experiences. We now set about making acquaintance with each other and narrating our stories. We would divide ourselves and sit in small groups. For hours the narratives were told and heard. There was enough material—the Chittagong Armoury Raid, the wellknown Midnapore actions, attempts on Villiers and Watson, the Saunders

murder, the Assembly Bomb case, the Naujawan Bharat Sabha, The Bengal Students' Movement, the activities of our Bihar and Assam comrades in most unfavourable situations ; all these topics had interesting history. In knowing them we were unconsciously beginning to acquire a comprehensive view of our immediate past. It helped us to such an extent in subsequent days in our task of self-criticism and correct appraisal of our movement.

The strike had ended in July and one of the facilities that we had obtained was the opportunity of celebrating Durga Pujah—the most important annual festival of Bengal. Barring a few of us, we were not people to be moved to spiritual fervour over the worship of a god or goddess. Not that we all were turned atheists, after a profound study of the materialist and the idealist philosophies. In our outside life, in the midst of the rough-and-tumble of daily work, we had no leisure for such abstract studies. But we had been affected by the prevailing spirit of Renaissance in our country. We did not take things for granted. We had the Nihilist in us who did not bow down before things only because they had a tradition behind. Besides, this outlook was engendered in us by the very nature of our work. In the midst of the modern world conditions where there is chaos and tumult all round, where a regime that has outlived its historic usefulness is fast decaying and disintegrating, human lives very often offer a sad tragic spectacle seldom interspersed by any streak of joy. Many who feel confused and depressed run to religion to get a solace in their anguish. Ideas of heavens or slogans like 'Thy will be done' are alluring to them. But there are others who see on the horizon the dawn of a new era. They work and fight for its advent. The very logic of their life-work makes

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we devoted most of our resources and it proved to be the most successful item of our celebration. We formed our Drama Committee that included among its members, coach, manager, electrical engineer, prompter, technical director, music master, in short, the complete troupe of a dramatic company. For scenes we collected a large number of our bedsheets and stitched them together. Our painter comrades by their day and night labour transformed them into scenes far better than what one ordinarily finds in amateur dramatic clubs of our small towns. Wings also were painted. Our artists had been so successful in their enterprise that they earned universal praise. One local high official even expressed his desire to purchase one of the scenes. While on our side, the large number of actors and 'actresses' were busy with their rehearsal, on the other hand, there was a mushroom growth of committees for different functions. We had our Puja Committee, Stores Committee, Amusement Committee, Reception Committee, Kitchen Committee or Subscription Committee—the list was endless. It seemed as if we were determined to realise one part of the slogan of the future society, 'from each according to his ability.' Only a few comrades were left who had not shouldered any responsibility. There were regular formal and informal meetings of the committees with resolutions, amendments, budgets and cuts,—in short, we were out to stage a big affair in our jail life.

The Kitchen Committee had a most thankless task to perform, for it had to deprive us of a part of our daily rations. It was collected and stored for the four day feast for us and for the large number of ordinary prisoners also, whom we were allowed to entertain. Our month of preparation passed so quickly; and then one day, amidst beating of brass gongs (jail

them bold and self-confident. They do not run to a church or a temple to seek peace or strength. In our exploited country, the people were in abject misery. But they were not docile. The national struggle had begun and we too, in our own way had participated in it. In the forward march we had not found the reverence for religion helpful in the awakening of greater and greater numbers of our countrymen ; it tended to encourage on the contrary, a spirit of acquiescence and a fatalistic outlook. Then how could we, who believed in defiance, in organised fight, help becoming indifferent and often averse to rituals and the like that passed in the name of religion? But religious festivals in their practical aspect are valued usually by the mass of poor people not for their professed spiritual content but in reality, for their affording opportunities to add a little colour and charm to their daily humdrum lives. The few festival days of the year were prescribed by the handful few of the upper classes, only to make somewhat tolerable the life of the common man. Without this hypothesis, it is hard to explain the association with the ceremonies, of large scale entertainments, music, dance, decoration, and feasts etc.

We were not poor in the ordinary sense of the term, but within jail walls our poverty was obvious in that, we had no chance for several years to have gaiety in our lives. Durga Pujah had approached and we therefore, readily seized the opportunity as an occasion for having a grand festival, rich in its round of amusements and other social features.

The authorities were in a mood to oblige us and they came promptly to our help. It was now that we discovered what diverse talents we had in our ranks. Artists for different kinds of work came forward to take charge of specific tasks. To drama,

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The Kitchen Committee had a most thankless task to perform, for it had to deprive us of a part of our daily rations. It was collected and stored for the four day feast for us and for the large number of ordinary prisoners also, whom we were allowed to entertain. Our month of preparation passed so quickly; and then one day, amidst beating of brass gongs (jail



plates) and dhols and loud meaningless shouts of a bunch of our youngest and most naughty comrades, the beginning of Puja was heralded, with the ceremony of 'Infusion of life' in the idol of the mother Durga. The beautiful idol had been fashioned by one of our comrades who was an expert hand at this art. The function of carrying on Pujah rituals fell on three comrades who took up the task very seriously. They belonged to that minority which consisted of devoted and ardent believers. In the face of their manifest devotion, other comrades in general did nothing that could in any way be construed to mean disrespectful or incompatible behaviour. But there is always exception to the rule. On the second day of the Puja, some mischievous fellows stole a part of the essential puja articles. When the matter was widely known, one of our theist comrades, who had felt greatly hurt, declared that he would go on hunger-strike, as a protest against the irresponsible and the shameless act. There was a search for the culprits but they were not to be found. An ugly situation was developing till at the eleventh hour it was saved by the discovery of the stolen articles in a remote but open corner of the yard. We all thanked our stars, for that night our main drama was to be staged and we had feared that its enjoyment would be marred by the day's incident. The dramas, during the three nights proved to be the most important and enjoyable feature of our whole programme. Both the actors and the 'actresses' and the people in the auditorium were satisfied. In the middle class Bengali families, specially of the towns, training in dramatic art, music and dance etc., is generally treated as a sign of polish and culture. These faculties are assiduously developed. Most of us had in our outside life, participated in theatrical performances, or had been keenly interested in them. The dramas

were staged therefore, on a fairly high level. They turned out to be real live performances, and not mere apologies for them. There was some dancing too, but our dancers could be congratulated rather for their boldness, than for art, for they had never danced before. It was funny to witness their limping figures on the stage followed by the focus thrown by our expert electric light operator. Good or bad, our dancers were greeted with tumultuous applause at their finale when bowing 'gracefully' to the audience they vanished behind the wings.

During the daytime too, we had a round of entertainments. There were Burmese dances and concert, dagger-play and physical feats, sports and many other items. In between the amusements we had delicious dishes, served under the supervision of our kitchen experts.

After a crowded programme of five days our Pujah was over. We had enjoyed the festival more than we expected. We now craved for a change. Normal seriousness of our life returned. We began chalking out our programme and our daily routine etc., each with an eye on his own special abilities. new.

## CHAPTER IV

### RETROSPECT

In the new order of things studies and discussions formed the main feature. Our reading was, however, anarchic at this stage. It lacked a system, or a clear purpose. A few comrades would form a group and read jointly while many would study individually on their own lines. There was no uniformity in the choice of books. Some busied themselves with the pages of the ancient Indian History and culture; others read modern European history. Several comrades who had been severed from their college life by their arrests, renewed their college studies. For our young comrades who had no opportunity to enter the university precincts, lectures on elementary biology, physics, and chemistry etc. were organised. The latest experiments and discoveries in these domains filled their minds with curiosity. An amazing variety of books on different subjects were read in succession. Cheiro's 'Palmistry,' Hazen's 'Europe since 1815,' Bertrand Russel's 'Roads to Freedom,' Liangli's 'China in Revolt,' Bernard Shaw's 'Saint Joan,' Saratbabu's 'Shesh Prashna,' Rabi Babu's 'Shesher Kabita'—such diverse books would be read by a single individual, one followed by the other. This phenomenon was not rare. It was rather a common sight. No doubt some of us were pursuing a definite line of critical studies but our number was negligible. The general trend was more like excursions in the intellectual domain. Such incoherent reading of our early days could not contribute to our general political advancement.

What, however, proved of great help to us, was the discussions of those days and our review of the past. Coming from different places, we had brought with us different experiences gained in our specific party work. There were some who had been sentenced to long terms for organisational activities. A few others had been charged for murder or attempt to murder, some were imprisoned for dissemination of revolutionary literature, while a large number had been convicted under the Arms and Explosives Acts. Again, the raiding of postal mails accounted for many convictions. Parties also there were more than one. Those coming from provinces other than Bengal had been members of the Hindustan Socialist Republican Association. The majority who belonged to Bengal had been mostly members of the one or the other of the four important groups—Anushilan, Jugantar, 'Revolting Party' and the Shree Sangh. The former two were the old pioneer parties of Bengal, active since the first decade of the century. The third group, as its name signifies, originated with the revolt of some members of these two parties. These persons had come together with the idea of following a more extreme programme. Shree Sangh also was of recent birth. One need not be surprised at the formation of these groups when the broad aims and the methods of the movement were the same. We have to seek the reason in the class-character and the composition of the movement. In the world history wherever a petty bourgeois class has endeavoured to form revolutionary cadres exclusively from within its own ranks, and carry on its secret conspiratorial activities isolated from the masses, the movement has manifested distinct signs of anarchism. Unco-ordinated scattered groups have functioned in the place of a centralized

organisation. Loyalty to leading individuals has dominated in place of allegiance to clear ideas, and sporadic actions have been witnessed instead of a planned campaign. Coming thus from various groups and with different convictions, it was at first no easy task for us to hold discussions with that degree of freedom and frankness without which they lose all meaning. The initial difficulty, however, was soon overcome. We realised that sooner or later we would be free once more to take our share in the country's struggle. We had to go out with clear ideas about the fight, the aims and the methods to be followed, and the forces to be mobilised. But how could we acquire a correct perspective of the future unless we critically surveyed our past and, from our general experience, detected our mistakes and weak spots?

So began the process of self-criticism. We became the judges of our own activities. For this purpose no better place could be had than the prison. In the jail we were far away from the din and bustle of outside struggle, or from the heat of a raging conflict. We could take a dispassionate view of things such as would have been quite impossible outside. Bertrand Russel in one of his books, analysing a revolutionary character observes that standing in the thick of a grim fight a revolutionary worker is infected with a fanaticism that makes it impossible for him to take an unbiased and objective view of things. But he has overstressed the point. We had, no doubt, in us a spirit that was akin to fanaticism but it was for the cherished goal and not for any particular method. It is true that our goal was not clearly defined. It was vague, and yet it was there. We stood for national revolution, for the liberation of our oppressed millions. Our very determination to reach the objective led us to judge ourselves and admit our mistakes.